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MR. HUTCHINSON'S GRAY EYES WERE ALMOST MESMERICALLY RIVETED ON GEORGIE'S DELICATELY PALE FACE.

GEORGIE SINCLAIR'S DOUBT.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

This night was dark and dreary. A dense fog hung heavy as a pall over the deserted streets, for it was close upon eleven o'clock, and by that hour even in the busy, bustling seaport of H—the turmoil and the din of traffic for awhile were hushed, though long before the sun should rise next morning in the pale November sky the docks would be thronged by a nondescript crowd, hurrying hither, thither, carrying loads, pushing barrows, shouting, bullying, or gesticulating, as the case might be, as each human unit bent its back once more to the burthen—the burthen of Life, which is, alas! so heavy to those who toil for mere daily bread.

Rounding the angle of a broad street a

heavily laden cab comes jolting leisurely; along the gloomy, ill-paved thoroughfare known as "Dock-side" it lumbers slowly, for why should Jehu bestir himself to urge his lean mare forward when his "fare," as well he knows, is "onlins goin' aboard!" which, after all, is quite a different matter "t' catchin' of a train, attendin' a weddin' or a burryin', as th' case may be!"

The vehicle comes to a full stop at last—there, where the gloom is densest, and the tall masts crowd up towards the lowering sky like the colossal spears of some spectral army, so closely are they packed.

"Can't get no nigher, sur!" at length growls cabbie, in hoarse, sepulchral tones, as with a movement threatening dislocation he twists his head half off his shoulders in a futile effort to peer in at the open window of the cab. "Eest git out here, I doubt!"

There was a monosyllabic grunt of acquiescence from within. Cabbie forthwith tumbled off his perch, and his "fare" alighted.

A couple of stalwart loiterers from beneath the shadow of the dock-sheds darted forward, wrangling in guttural tones as they made a simultaneous onslaught on the solitary travel-stained portmanteau which constituted the *pièce de résistance* of the somewhat miscellaneous collection of shabby luggage.

"Now, now!" growled the proprietor, in tones of menace, as he fumbled with finger and thumb in his waistcoat pocket. "Look sharp, there, and less noise, or I'll send you both about your business! On board the *Python*! Yes. She's lying close up 'longside—to the right there!"

"Here you are, sir, for the *Python*! To the right, man alive!" shouted the mate of the vessel in question, as he came bustling forward, with a decisive and authoritative air which simplified matters greatly, at once reducing the "loafers" to order and submission, and effectually reassuring the somewhat bewildered "fare."

The process of transferring the luggage to

the hold of the vessel was speedily accomplished, the volunteer porters were paid and despatched, cabbie received his exact "dues" (with contemptuous silence far more eloquent than any spoken words), and ambled off, emitting low grunts of dissatisfaction, in the direction where his patient hack stood chewing the bit disconsolately.

"Halloo, there!" suddenly escaped his lips, as he came to a full stop a few paces from his cab. "Blowed if I'd a notion you was there! Yer kept snug enuff, anyhow!"

The small personage thus apostrophised turned a pale face and beseeching eyes towards the speaker, but for a moment she attempted no reply.

She stood quite still, clutching tightly the leathern handles of a bursting travelling bag, which had probably known some service ere the damsel in question first saw the light; then moistening her pale, quivering lips preparatory to the effort of speech, she faltered tremulously:

"—It is I who am going across! Has papa gone on board? Will he come back here to fetch me? or has he— You see," she broke off abruptly in apologetic tones, "I have never been in the docks before, and it is so dark to-night I cannot find my way! Which of these vessels is the *Python*? and—"

But "now then, Georgie!" at this juncture came suddenly through the fog. "What on earth are you loitering behind there for! Do you think I mean dawdling about here all night! Have you all your belongings, child! It will be useless remembering to-morrow that you left 'this' or 'that' behind!"

"Yes, papa, I— I have everything, thank you; only—I can scarcely carry this bag!" came the quick response, in tones of relief, as the little figure stumbled forward, guided by those harsh, stentorian tones. "Good-night, cabman; thank you, thank you!" as the man picked up the alpaca umbrella which had slipped from under the girl's arm.

A moment later she was lost in the fog, whilst Bob Nichols clambered on to the box, ejaculating, with sundry significant grunts and snorts,—

"My eye! that's as rum a customer as ever I seed! Th' old boy, I'm meaning of!" he added, as though to the night air, or his nag, some such explanatory clues were due.

But just as he gathered up the reins, and emitted from between his lips a preliminary "Tohats!" the voice of the "old boy" in question arrested further movement on Jehu's part.

"Hi! You there! On second thoughts, you shall drive me back at once to the station. I'll be with you in a moment. Return fare, you know, half price!"

"Humph! that's as may be!" grunted cabbie, in an undertone, even as he touched his hat and let the reins fall loose. "We'll settle that question at t'other end, my fine gent. Seein' as I've paid a'ready for the one lot, I take it this next is another straightfurrard, plain-sailin' job, if ever I seed one at ten o'clock o' night."

This ticklish question it is happily beyond the immediate province of the historian to decide. Suffice it to say that some few moments later Bob Nichols was rattling his "fare" at a somewhat unusual pace through the silent streets in a praiseworthy desire "t'land" that "precious lot" as soon as might be at the railway station, with a view to retiring in person from active service for the night.

Meanwhile, what of that inexperienced little traveller left behind, setting forth (for the first time in her brief, blameless space of life) solitary and end, on a long and perilous journey into an unknown world?

CHAPTER II.

"Will you come a bit nigher the fire, miss?" "No thank you," was the response, in gentle, tones (slightly tremulous, perhaps), as the speaker threw up her thick lace fall and glanced timidly round the spacious cabin.

The stewardess stirred the bright fire to a

flame, arranged the chairs on either side, glanced approvingly towards the swinging lamp hanging from the central beam, and then, folding her fat hands in her blue check apron, approached the solitary passenger, seated on the extreme edge of the crimson velvet *couchette*.

"It looks comfort'ble, I hope you think, miss?" she questioned, in kindly tones, gazing with something of compassionate interest in her eyes into the girl's pale, delicate face. "We don't rough it aboard to quite th' extent as land folks think—as, indeed, many a passenger is pleas'd t' observe afore they finds themselves o' th' other side. Your first journey, miss, eh? Ah! I thought as much. You look nobbut young an' inexperienced like!"

For sole reply the girl smiled faintly, loosening the collar of her jacket as though it impeded respiration.

Delicately white and exquisitely moulded was the slender throat thus revealed, whilst the rounded bosom below, heaving tumultuously, unmistakably betrayed that fierce internal conflict which Georgie Sinclair would have given all she was worth at that moment effectually to have concealed.

With ready sympathy the warm-hearted stewardess offered her assistance.

"Ay, ay, best take your coat off a bit. It's close an' tryin' down here, comin' in and out o' the fresh night air. These! ye'll be more comfort'ble so!" as Georgie disengaged her arms from her thick cloth jacket, and smiled gratefully (though her pale lips yet trembled) up into the woman's weather-beaten face. "I lay this is yer first voyage, miss, eh? But yer no afear'd o' the sea! That's right," as the girl shook her head emphatically. "More nor half the danger lays in folks' imaginin's. Look at me now! I've been makin' th' passage this twinty year or more, an' never had so much as a hair o' my head a-achin' th' whiles I was aboard!"

Towards the close of this peroration, the stewardess, dispensing with ceremony, sank down on the couch by the girl's side, still gazing into the half-averted face with almost maternal tenderness in her own grey eyes.

"Yer a bit downhearted, miss, eh? Yer've parted w' yer pa for th' first time, I reckon! Ah! well, cheer up! Yer'll be back again in less than no time, I doubt!"

But seeing that the girl responded only by a faint inclination of the head (which might, indeed, have been interpreted either as a gesture of acquiescence or dissent), the stewardess forthwith resigned her futile, though well-intentioned efforts at eliciting confidences from the young traveller's pale lips, and proceeded to busy herself with preparations for the girl's comfort overnight—Miss Sinclair having declared, with an irrepressible shudder, after duly inspecting her berth, that nothing would induce her to take refuge in that haven of the disconsolate; she would infinitely prefer to spend the night on the comfortable cabin couch.

"There are no other passengers on board, I think you said; so I shall not be in the way if I remain here!" she questioned, timidly, as she laid aside her small plumed hat and brushed back from her forehead the soft, yellow curls which clustered in hyacinthine rings above the dark, arched brows.

"Thank you!" as the stewardess arranged the cushions in the corner as a pillow for the girl's head. "Oh! I shall be very comfortable here, with my rug as counterpane if" (she added, anxiously) you are quite sure none of the sailors are likely to intrude!"

The stewardess laughed cheerily.

"Bless yer! I they don't dare to show their noses! I these parts, lettin' alone as they've other fish to fry! Yer'll see no one, my dear, savin' the capting (as may chance to look in late on) for them ladies in their berths 'all not stir out, I guess, till we get t' land. We'll have another gent aboard afore we're off—his traps is yonder, see! He was down a bit afore you, but when he heard that we'd most like not get up steam much afore five o'clock I th' mornin', he was off like a shot, declarin' he'd be for spendin' th' night on shore; so like enow he'll not turn up till th' *Python*'s shovin' off, when ten to one he'll remain on deck a-chatterin' w' th' pilot. Anyhow, no need t' fash yerself along o' him. I'll give a look in afore this, and bear yer company, if needs be—for three's a safe number, anyhow!"

Thus the matter was finally disposed of, and having tucked the little traveller up in a shadowy corner at the extreme end of the semi-circular couch, where the jutting partition wall of the ladies' cabin served to screen her from the intrusive rays of lamp-light, the stewardess finally took her leave of the wearied girl, who gladly drew the warm rug 'up about her ears, and, closing her eyes, with a sigh of relief, wooed slumber as a companion preferable just then, at any rate, to solitary reflection.

CHAPTER III.

MOST of my readers must be personally conversant with the indescribable sensation one experiences awakening from profound slumber amid unfamiliar surroundings; few will, therefore, be surprised to hear that when Georgie Sinclair, after some hours of unbroken sleep suddenly opened her blue eyes to find her delicate nose and chin in dangerous propinquity with the stuffed back of a stuffed velvet couch, her heart leaped one moment, painfully, and then stood absolutely still.

For a whole breathing space she found it impossible to collect her thoughts sufficiently to realise time, circumstance, and place; she lay motionless, in a bewilderingly defying analysis, cramped and chilled, despite of rugs and cushions, and with a dull, monotonous sound in her ears, like the far-off tramp of a thousand feet. Then she slowly turned her head; her eyes fell at once upon the lingering embers in the stove-grate; upon the lamp, now burning dim and with an uncertain flicker; upon the long cabin-table, strewn with books and maps and writing paraphernalia for the convenience of travellers; upon her own hand-bag and umbrella. And then Georgie Sinclair remembered all with a bitter pang and sense of desolation which written words can ill convey.

Yes, she was alone! alone upon the limitless, pathless Ocean; far from home and kindred and every tender association of her hitherto unchequered life! Alone! and bound for an unknown world, so no reassuring "still, small voice" whispered of hope to her fainting heart, though suddenly it occurred to her she was even then nearing her appointed bourn.

Had the vessel made much way? she wondered. What might the hour be? With this reflection, the monotonous ticking of the time-piece at the further end of the cabin arrested her attention, and, turning back the rug, she started to her feet. Then she remained for one long minute spell-bound, motionless, like a creature turned to stone; her very breathing arrested; her lips parted; one hand outstretched; her dark eyes wide, distended; her whole attitude betraying amazement, not unmixed with fear.

Yet surely not so very alarming an apparition, after all, that which met the girl's gaze and blanched her cheek, till it might well have rivalled the newly-fallen snow—for a tall, lissom, broad-shouldered Englishman, lounging at his ease, should surely inspire a confident sense of security in the feminine breast in just proportion to those misgivings with which undoubtedly he is calculated to impress his country's foes.

A pale, clear-cut profile, somewhat sallow beneath the lamp's lustrous, searching rays; a closely-cropped, dark, curled head, supported on a stony hand, delicate as a woman's on which a solitary brilliant gleamed and glittered as it caught the light—basilisk-like, for a moment riveting the girl's gaze; such the salient points of which Georgie became vaguely conscious, as her fellow-traveller (his blase ignorance of such scrutiny) continued with downward eyes to scan the broad expanse of the *Times* newspaper, spread open beneath his arm.

Then unconsciously she stirred; as she stirred, he started; and starting, turned—turned to encounter the girl's dark eyes fixed upon him with a curious minglement of terror and amazement.

For a full moment thus they gazed at one another in mute astonishment, too profound for words; then the man rose, involuntarily, to his feet, and "The d—!" I regret to say, was the ejaculation which escaped his lips!

"I beg your pardon," he was murmuring, one second later, real contrition in his voice and eyes. "But if you could form the vaguest conception of my amaze, you—would pardon my unparliamentary outburst, I'm sure. I—I fancied myself quite alone, you see, and then to be suddenly confronted by so—ahem!—charming an apparition, was somewhat startling to weak nerves you'll admit! If I may venture to inquire, where on earth did you spring from? Let me first offer you a chair by the fire, though! You don't seem very comfortable over there!"

"Thank you!" faltered Georgie, though she made no attempt to rise. "I went to sleep on the couch here before the vessel started. The stewardess thought I should not be in the way, and I preferred the cabin to my berth. I'm very sorry—" she went on, apologetically, but at this point the argument came abruptly to a full stop—perhaps because it just then dawned upon her that, despite an unaccountable sense of criminality, it was assuredly not to this stranger explanations or excuses were due.

"You would have preferred your berth then, after all," rejoined the tall unknown (evidently mistaking the drift of this vague statement), with a smile which displayed his white teeth to infinite advantage beneath the dark fringe of his moustache. "Well, I think, on the whole, ladies are wiser to turn in; though, personally, I must confess I would spend the night in the rigging, or lashed to the helm, rather than take refuge upon one of those unsavoury shelves by courtesy called 'berths.' By the way, is it fair to conclude that you slept the sleep of the just, in spite of all drawbacks? For I'll take my oath you have not stirred nor drawn a deep breath for the past two hours, during which I cherished the fond delusion of being in solitary possession of this state apartment. I took a general survey on entering, and noticed (as I fancied) a bundle of rugs—*voilà tout!*—on the couch. Had I been aware of your gentle presence, I should have hesitated to intrude upon your slumbers."

Georgie essayed a smile, any more suitable reply falling at the moment to present itself to her mind. Forthwith, however, she became uncomfortably conscious of the bright colour which had mounted (she scarce knew wherefore) to her soft cheek; her eyelids fluttered, drooped; her white fingers interlaced themselves; she caught her rosy nether lip unwittingly between her pearly teeth—thus, speechless and motionless, affording as perfect and tender a study of maiden embarrassment as the eye of a connoisseur might hope to light upon.

Such, at any rate, was the reflection which crossed her fellow-traveller's mind, as he gazed with fervent admiration at the blushing girl. Moreover, that the situation was, in truth, peculiar and delicately suggestive, was an awkward fact, which dawned suddenly upon our hero's somewhat obtuse perceptions—for had he not unwittingly intruded his masculine presence upon beauty's dulcet slumbers? and had not the sleeping fair awoke to find herself *tête-à-tête* with a perfect stranger, under the most unusual circumstances, at the dead of night? For though Georgie cherished the delusion that she was many leagues away from British shores, truth to tell, the *Python* had not as yet got up steam, and was not destined to weigh anchor for an hour or more.

Ergo, the voyage was "all before them" (as one of the travellers was not slow to recollect, with a quick throb of satisfaction); of a surety, therefore, it behoved these somewhat incongruous companions to set one another forthwith at perfect ease, by making the very best of the "situation." The exact means employed to obtain so desirable a consummation, time and space alike forbid my attempting to detail; suffice it to state that scarce a quarter of an hour later Georgie found herself in possession of a low arm-chair on one side of a blazing fire (for the grate had been plentifully replenished), with her small feet reposing on one

of the velvet cushions of the couch, her cheeks aglow, her eyes scintillating softly, as the rosy firelight turned to threads of ruddy gold her blonde and slightly disordered tresses.

And he sat opposite—at a respectful distance, however—gazing now into the embers, now around the cabin, more rarely into his companion's flushed and lovely face, as he chatted gaily of a thousand trifles, his primary object just then being to divert the girl's mind from embarrassing reflections, and at the same time to conceal the boundless admiration with which she had suddenly inspired him—and admiration which it required the exercise of the most intense self-control effectually to disguise.

For men's eyes have an awkward trick of revealing, all too often, what their discreeter lips repress; and, from time immemorial, hath not silence sometimes possessed a subtle eloquence denied to the most loquacious tongue?

But our wily traveller on this occasion proved himself a veritable master of *finesse*; and so well did his cautious tactics succeed, that ere an hour had passed all lingering traces of embarrassment had vanished from his companion's bearing—she was laughing and chattering with complete unreserve, and an innocent freedom of manner which she would perhaps have hesitated to indulge with the majority of her acquaintance under more conventional circumstances, even after the familiar intercourse of years; but then the stewardess had ultimately paid that promised visit of inspection to the cabin to assure herself that all went well, when she had been further beguiled by the astute young man into taking part in the conversation for some few moments—the entire situation being thus invested with a prosaic and desirably commonplace air, which effectually set Georgie at her ease ere the two travellers found themselves once more *tête-à-tête*.

The captain, too, put in an appearance later, when the *Python* had gallantly steered her course through the dock-gate out into the wide, black stream.

Steaming coffee was then served, at the request of Georgie's new friend, and biscuits were produced by the stewardess, this innocent refectory not only serving to beguile half-an-hour's tedium, but exerting likewise an exhilarating effect on the spirits of the erstwhile dejected girl.

In due course, however, maiden intuition whispered that Georgie would do well to best a retreat to the haven of the ladies' cabin, and, although the first pale streak of light had indeed dawned in the cold grey east ere she wished her companion "good night," yet feminine scruples were allayed and soothed, and "the proprieties" duly propitiated, by this sacrifice of personal inclination to the exigencies of conventional obligations.

CHAPTER IV.

"You don't mean to say, miss, as how he's kep' you entirely in the dark?"

"I do, indeed!" was the emphatic rejoinder, whilst Georgie's dark eyes—opened to their utmost extent, and expressive of absolute incredulity—were riveted upon her companion's ruddy features, eloquent reflex just then of the mind within, where good-natured amusement and hilarity were for the moment paramount, the stewardess of the *Python* being one of those exceptional mortals whose lively interests are easily awakened, and whose sympathies are readily enlisted on behalf of the temporary object of their solicitude.

And for this dark-eyed golden-haired little traveller, the good woman's heart just now throbbled with almost maternal tenderness; for there was, indeed, something so innocently confiding, so helplessly appealing, in Georgie's manner, that her fellow-creatures were apt to feel themselves necessitated to make her simple griefs and joys their own, and her temporal welfare, to some extent, their personal care. Thus it happened that before nightfall of the day succeeding the eve of embarkation the stewardess, the gruff-voiced captain, the round Dutch pilot, and (last, but assuredly not least) her solitary fellow-passenger, seemed to have bound them-

selves in a league by the most solemn oaths to devote themselves individually and collectively to the service of this shy-eyed maid, with sweet mutinous lips like a ripe cleft cherry, around which the dimples played in a fashion at once defiant and provocative.

She was seated now on deck, in a sheltered corner, with the captain's top coat folded as a foot-stool for her feet, and a judicious arrangement of wraps at her back to support her head and shield her shoulders from the stiff breeze which had sprung up from the east, ruffling the waters as with myriads of small white feathers. Yet the moon was rising in a silver sea of glory, so the captain had suggested that "the little lady" should come up on deck for a while, which step Georgie's fellow-passenger had warmly seconded. So, behold the damsel now settled finally at her ease, with the stewardess in sole attendance for the moment—her cavalier *servente* having hurried below in search of a certain rug which he declared absolutely indispensable to her comfort.

"You've never chanced to ask his name, I lay, then?" the stewardess proceeded, interrogatively, wiping a splash of foam from off her weather-beaten brow with the corner of her blue serge apron.

"I did, indeed," responded Georgie, with an air of mystification; "for when he politely inquired my name, I thought myself fully at liberty to return the compliment, and he said, 'Hutchinson—Fred Hutchinson.' I'm sure he did," she repeated, emphatically, as though to make assurance doubly sure, and put to flight some hazy remnant of incredulity lurking in the recesses of her own mind.

"Hutchinson, indeed," echoed the stewardess, with a chery laugh. "You ask our captain. He'll tell yer as him there is none other than a live English lord—an' as fine a specimen of the class (if my opinion's worth takin') as these eyes of mine were ever clapped upon. Oh, my, here he comes, an' all. Well, I'm off. You'll be right enuff now, miss, an' no mistake," and, with a knowing smile and wink, the worthy woman whisked herself down the cabin stairs into the regions below.

"You despaired of ever seeing me again, possibly," cried Georgie's new friend, at the top of his voice, as, bending his head to meet the breeze, he staggered towards her under manifest difficulties—for with one hand he struggled to keep his hat upon his head, whilst his other arm clutched rugs enough to have furnished a camp-hospital. "I had to unstrap a bale of wraps, and that loquacious pilot fell upon me in an unguarded moment, and 'nalled' me, *volens volens*. Talk of a woman's tongue, indeed. Why, the most inveterate gossiping British beldame isn't 'in it' with an average specimen of the long-winded foreign whistakerandos. Here you are, Miss Sinclair," as he bent and wrapped a voluminous bearskin, warmly lined, about her knees. "And now, if you'll take my advice, you'll have this plaid round your shoulders. Sa. Now you're pretty well invincible, I should say, and can well defy blustering old Boreas to do his very worst."

Georgie submitted graciously enough to the young man's judicious arrangements for her comfort; and behold him a few moments later seated beside her, his every faculty for the nonce absorbed in pointing out in the vast mysterious vault above their heads the relative positions of Capricorn, Orion and the Gemini—the girl's mind proving absolutely gulfless of the simplest rudiments of astronomy, to the infinite satisfaction of her companion, who at once perceived that the rôle of professor is not without advantages, given certain conditions of facilities for observation.

These were certainly not wanting in the present instance, for when the captain (a full hour later) suggested the desirability of "the young lady's" retiring belowstairs, Georgie was still gazing wide-eyed, and with sweet lips parted, up at the star-spangled firmament—darkly, deeply blue to-night, although the full moon shined high in a cloudless sky, unspotted by the smallest fleecy particle.

That the conversation had, however, descended

to matters mundane the reader may possibly infer, when the fact is chronicled that though the girl still gazed heavenward, Mr. Hutchinson's grey eyes were almost mesmerically riveted on her delicately pale face, invested just then with a strange spirituelle beauty as the wan moonlight kissed her brow, and silvered o'er with a chaste, pallid lustre the wind-tossed, feathery curls which framed her features like a halo.

For in truth it had dawned upon the young man's mind that never throughout the whole course of his earthly pilgrimage (despite the varied vicissitudes and manifold experiences of his eight-and-twenty years) had he encountered mortal maid possessed of a tithes of that indefinable charm which lurked (like some subtle aroma) about George Sinclair's girlish figure and flower-like face—"impregnating the very air around her like aspell," he sententially reflected, as he heaved a rapturous sigh.

This sage conclusion the long night's solitary meditation but tended to confirm, and by ten o'clock the following morning, when the full muster of the passengers had emerged from the seclusion of their respective berths and congregated upon deck, whilst the *Python* steamed slowly down the broad bosom of the river, Mr. Hutchinson leant over the bulwarks of the vessel, a prey to the gloomiest reflections.

For there was land ahead, land on either side—no possibility of cherishing erroneous convictions on that head; and so parting, alas! was imminent and inevitable—parting, which just then meant anguish, our impressionable young traveller muttered between his teeth, as he gnawed fiercely at the corners of his dark moustache, and turned his head to perceive the fair subject of his thoughts emerging, travelling bag in hand, from the aperture—by courtesy dubbed "staircase," conducting to cabin regions.

He hastened forward to relieve her of what he termed her "impedimenta," and a few moments later these two were seated side by side, gazing silently into the placid waters—stirred just then into a sea of foam, as the *Python* imperiously clove its way, straight as an arrow, midway the stream.

For some moments neither spoke, each realising painfully (conscious that the same idea was paramount in the other's breast), that the inevitable moment of adieu drew near—that fateful moment indeed be written at the close of an episode so pleasant that each young heart just then bitterly regretted the tendency of all earthly joys to hasten to a close.

"Miss Sinclair, you must reprove me if I am too presumptuous; but indeed I cannot watch that fatal shore bearing down upon us, as it were, and refrain from finally hazzarding the question which has been hovering upon my tongue for the last four-and-twenty hours," Mr. Hutchinson broke forth, impetuously, at length. "You mentioned that your destination was Liège; should you regard it as an unpardonable liberty if I ventured to inquire farther?"

Was it his fancy? or did the girl's cheek indeed one moment flush, whilst for half a breathing space her eyelids fluttered, as though just then she would fain have veiled those dark windows of the soul?

"Put your question," she answered, lightly. "I shall then (and then only) be in a position to reply definitely on the minor count."

"What is the object of your journey? Have you friends or relatives whom you design to visit? If so, where do they hang out?" He finished unceremoniously, in the tone of a desperate man: "I must know where you are located."

Miss Sinclair obviously hesitated; then she essayed a faint laugh, which, however, expired drearily enough, like the merest mockery of mirth.

"Ha! Ha! I understand. It is my address you are desirous of learning," she retorted, evasively (and now Hutchinson was sure there was a faint access of colour to her creamy cheek). "Well, I will pardon your curiosity, and gratify it fully, providing only—" She paused.

"Only?" he echoed, interrogatively.

The girl laughed.

"I, too, have a question to ask, but I claim

the privilege of my sex, and demand a reply from you, before proceeding, in my turn, to allay your inquisitiveness."

"Place aux dames!" retorted the young man, heartily. "I surrender at discretion. Fire away, fair enemy! discharge your small shot as mercilessly as you please, only leave me breath to—"

"A truce to further parley!" Georgie interrupted, with a melodramatic air. "Time is flying, and so is the *Python*, seemingly; we shall be 'long shore' before we have given or received mutual satisfaction; so to the point, then! Sir, may I inquire whether you designedly, and with malice aforethought, deceived me when you introduced yourself as 'Mr. Hutchinson'?"

The young man flushed hotly, then he laughed; but his embarrassment was palpable.

"I certainly was guiltless of all malice," he answered, lightly; "and I can but reiterate my name is Hutchinson! Have you reason to doubt my veracity, Miss Sinclair?"

"On that count, every reason; for (unless rumour lies) I am creditably informed that your name is Grafton—Lord Grafton, I may add!"

"Yet I was not guilty of an untruth, Miss Sinclair. I swear as much."

"On the honour of a British—nobleman!"

"On the honour of a true Briton—and a gentleman!" he returned, emphatically.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Georgie, clapping her small hands in triumph. "It is all U.P.I. You are betrayed (though not forewarned), so forthwith make full confession!"

"Run to earth, I see!" muttered the young man, with a scowl; "so I suppose I've no alternative but to throw up the sponge, and declare myself in my true colours, lest you might possibly conclude I had some good (or bad) reason for prolonging what, after all, was but an innocent deception. For my family name is Hutchinson, Miss Sinclair, and until six months ago I was not called upon to answer to any other; by the death of my father, however, in the spring, I found myself metamorphosed into Grafton."

"But why did you not tell me the truth at the outset?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"I scarcely know: perhaps because I was an ass; perhaps because one gets rather sick of going about the world labelled, 'A real, live British lord!' The effect is not unfrequently the same as that produced by, 'This side up—with care!' Folks give a fellow an uncommonly wide berth, and the commonality treat one as though liable to fracture unless handled with infinite tact. And so—well, surely you can understand that I preferred (for a score of reasons) introducing your humble servant to your notice simply as Fred Hutchinson!"

There was very genuine anxiety in his manly tones as he asked this question, bending forward with more eagerness than the occasion seemed to warrant, to read his answer in the girl's eyes.

But for one long moment these were averted. Georgie remained unaccountably silent, though she would, perhaps, have found it difficult to analyse the precise source of the emotion which just then held her mute.

"Yes, I understand!" she said, at length, and the low voice, slightly tremulous, seemed to betray some *arrière pensée* which her pale lips repressed.

"And likewise forgive! Say that I am acquitted, Miss Sinclair!"

"Of malicious intent, yes!" she answered, slowly; "of wilful perversion of the truth, no—a thousand times, no!"

"Yet you will not prove implacable—you grant me absolution?"

"Yes! oh, yes!" she answered, somewhat wearily; "and now I think I must go below, and finally interview my tried friend the stewardess!"

"Stay! our contract is not yet fulfilled! It is now my turn to question, yours to reply. You cannot have forgotten that clause in the agreement, surely?"

Georgie laughed.

"It had slipped my memory for the moment, I must confess. Well, I am bound for school!"

This abrupt period was rounded by an involuntary sigh.

"School! I thought as much, though most young ladies of your mature years deem their education concluded. But you are probably bent on improving your French—accents not quite up to the mark, I suppose, or something of the sort?"

The girl nodded. She was gazing fixedly across the wide stream just at that moment, and therefore, perhaps, hazarded no more definite reply.

"And where is your future scholastic retreat situated?" Lord Grafton persisted.

Georgie, still gazing afar, slowly pronounced the desired address.

"But," the young man proceeded, impatiently, "you surely do not mean to waste many months of the very flower of your youth pent up in durance vile! You might have perfected your French at home, or— How long, however, do you propose remaining under this Madame What's-her-name's maternal care?" he concluded abruptly, some "happy thought" having apparently presented itself suddenly to his mind.

"A-about twelve months," returned Georgie, slowly.

But, despite a valiant attempt to speak unconcernedly, her voice sounded forced and strained even to her own ear.

"About a twelvemonth!" echoed his lordship. "To be accurate, then, you propose quitting madame's establishment the last week in November, 18—! Supposing, therefore, I should happen to find myself in Belgium towards the close of next year (which, by the way, is more than probable), have I your permission to call upon you in the Rue des Capuchins to make inquiries as to your travelling arrangements? For, in the event of your being about to return alone to England, I should venture to crave your acceptance of my escort!"

"Oh, no, no!" was all Miss Sinclair could find voice or energy to reply. "You are very kind, but, indeed—indeed, you must not think of such a thing!"

"But wherefore?" the young man persisted.

"I may truly say, I shall never in all my life forget the pleasure I have experienced in your society during this henceforth memorable voyage. It would be much to anticipate during the long, dreary year yet ahead if you would permit me to cherish the hope of once more traversing the briny in your 'sweet company.' Moreover," he added, earnestly, "as this tedious journey is for you, in any case, compulsory, surely you will do better to accept my offer than to look forward to braving the perils of the deep alone!"

"True! Yet my movements are uncertain, and—"

"Ah! do not suppose that I would seek to bind you by any definite promise or agreement! Life for one and all of us is at best uncertain, yet—"

"You must not come!" interrupted Georgie, with sudden vehemence; "indeed, indeed, you must not!"

"You can but refuse to sanction the proceeding," returned Grafton, lightly, "and thus much you have already done in the most remorseless fashion; for the rest I decline to perjure myself, or imperil the welfare of my immortal soul, so I pledge myself to no rash vow of obedience to your imperious will! For a whole long year I propose to give this matter my most serious reflection; and if my views of life in general, and of travelling in particular, remain immutable, all I can say is, you will not improbably see your humble servant once again!"

As he thus sententially concluded, Lord Grafton doffed his hat with exaggerated courtesy; yet, despite the tone of gallantry he had seen fit to adopt, there was an undercurrent in his voice, and an expression in his eyes, which plainly conveyed that he was very much in earnest, and more seriously-minded than he desired to betray.

Feebly at first, then more vehemently, passionately, at length the girl reiterated that—

"Indeed, indeed, he must not come! She might be dead or married a year hence, and—"

"In that case," his lordship supplemented, quietly, "it will be best that I should forthwith acquaint myself with the true particulars of your tragic fate! I make no promise, Miss Sinclair. All I can say is: I most fervently hope and trust that a year hence, at latest, we may meet again!"

And up to the moment when final adieux were spoken Georgie had succeeded in eliciting nothing more definite from his lordship's lips. The girl parted from her new friend, it must be confessed, with a heavier heart than she cared to admit, when in silence and solitude she took herself severely to task, and would fain have traced the disquietude and *ennui* which possessed her to its true source.

Indeed, it may be that (despite the persistence with which she had insisted Lord Grafton should retract his ill-advised words and yet more reprehensible intent) Georgie Sinclair yet found her only comfort in that still small voice which seemed whispering ever in her ear, as she pursued her journey, sad and solitary, through a foreign land.

"Next year, perhaps, you may meet again!"

"Next year! next year!" broke at length passionately from her lips, as the train lumbered heavily through a tunnel, and the girl leaned her head back against the dusty cushions. "Ah! I may be dead ere then! Though, after all, it seems to me that I could resign life without regret! Glancing back I can but shudder, whilst looking ahead through the phalanx of advancing days and weeks and months, my heart turns faint with a chill misgiving, for may it not be that the years to come hold more bitterness than even the vanished past?"

Morbid reflections these to haunt the mind of "sweet seventeen;" yet Georgie Sinclair had graduated in adversity's rigorous school; the lessons she had learnt from life's crumpled page had been cruel enough; small wonder, then, that she regarded future experience as a still sterner task-master, whose grim hand might possibly deal out for her yet harder blows than those under whose memory she yet writhed!

The pity of it, that there was no kindly voice to whisper in her ear.—

"Courage, and heart, and cease repining! Behind the clouds is the sun still brightly shining! Youth need know no fear!"

CHAPTER V.

SHE was sobbing bitterly—bitterly, her white face buried in both hands, her slender frame shaken by the inward tempest which convulsed her, indignation, rage, despair, just then struggling for supremacy.

The scene was a cheerless and deserted school-room, looking out into a silent courtyard in Brussels. The hour was surely the dreariest of all the twenty-four, for twilight shadows were merging into evening gloom, and in a land where cheerful blazing fires or flickering flames are joys unknown, the decline of day is invaded with terrors which happy Britons "who stay at home at ease" may at best but vaguely realise.

A tall, masculine-visaged Belgian woman stood with folded arms placidly regarding the speechless discomfiture of her younger companion.

"Miss Sinclair" (she at length broke silence) "you are but losing time, and you have little or none to spare. Before noon to-morrow it will be necessary for you to take your departure, and you have of necessity all your preparations yet to make; be advised by me, therefore, and—"

"Madame, madame!" interrupted the weeping girl, clasping her hands entreatingly, and gazing up with piteous, streaming eyes into the stern features confronting her, "be merciful! Recind your cruel decree, and my whole future life shall be one long effort to prove my sense of gratitude!"

Madame Dudent shook her head with an inexorable air.

"Impossible, *chère mée*! The professor declares he will never again cross this threshold whilst you remain beneath this roof. I have no

choice, therefore, but to beg you will at once take your departure. The prosperity of my 'pension' is in the professor's hands. If I offend him, I may as well close my doors at once; and what can a poor lone woman do!" she concluded, pathetically, elevating brows and shoulders simultaneously.

"But I—I have explained to you the real circumstances of the case, madame!" sobbed the girl, passionately, roused at length to righteous indignation, and no longer a mere weeping penitent. "The professor has persecuted me with his infamous attentions since the first moment of my entrance here; and—and I suppose even the 'prosperity' of your school does not demand that an English girl must needs submit uncomplainingly to—the insolent embrace of—of a married man! It is quite true I boxed his ears, and—and in truth I would do the same again to-morrow!" she concluded, hotly, "if he dared to attempt to kiss me again!"

"And precisely in order to guard against the dangerous possibility of any such recurrence," returned madame, calmly, "you will, upon reflection, agree with me, *chère mée*, that the sooner you withdraw from my establishment the better. We are not accustomed to scenes of violent altercation between professors here, and after this morning's painful episode my course is clear. Your insular prejudices," she continued, smiling coldly, "are at war with our notions of the proprieties and—"

"The 'proprieties,' indeed!" echoed Georgie, fiercely. "Propriety is a word which foreigners are utterly incapable of understanding, and—"

Madame waved her hand (not altogether soiless, for the day was far advanced, and there are lands in which the natives make acquaintance with soap and water at most but once a day).

"We need not prolong the discussion, *mée*; you quite understand, I hope, that my decision is final!"

"But whither can I go at a moment's notice?" cried the girl, clasping her hands despairingly, indignation expiring in the presence of despair. "I, who have no money, no friends—"

"Return to Liège," suggested madame. "Madame Becque, in whose establishment you were pupil-teacher for more than eleven months, will surely receive you for a while, and aid you to seek employment. You have been here scarcely three weeks. Your claim upon my consideration and hospitality is consequently infinitesimal!"

Georgie shook her head, whilst the scalding tears continued to course down her cheeks.

"Madame Becque and I parted in—in—"

"Ah, yes! I recollect;" and Madame Dudent's thin lips parted in a cynical smile. "Madame Becque was justly displeased with you, in that you well-nigh insisted on obtaining your release from the 'pension' three weeks before the just term of your engagement had expired. You undertook the duties of junior English teacher for twelve months without salary, in return for board, lodging and lessons in various branches of study—*eh, bien!*"

"There were reasons—valid reasons," interrupted Georgie, hotly, "why I begged madame to cancel the last few weeks of my engagement. Of course, had she insisted, I must have remained, but as it was—"

"But 'as it was' so 'it is!'" supplemented her present employer, ironically, "and 'will be' to the end, it seems to me, for you appear destined to leave each engagement under circumstances more or less regrettable. Without doubt, however, you must be the best judge of your own affairs. I have only to say that after mid-day to-morrow I cannot permit of your remaining here!"

Then, with a visage stony as Medusa's, the inexorable Madame Dudent withdrew, and Georgie fell upon her knees before the cold black stove, and raising her hands impotently towards high heaven, cried aloud in agony of absolute despair that the bitterness of her portion was more than she could endure.

But echo alone mocked her anguish. Help from above or around there was none! Where, then, should she seek it? the friendless girl asked of her stricken heart—that

heart which throbbed to suffocation for some long moments ere it lay at length heavy as lead and marble cold within her palpitating breast.

Poor lonely, home-sick little teacher! stranded on the bleak, desolate shores of Madame Dudent's "Establishment."

CHAPTER VI.

"SHE, dear, I have two sovereigns and some odd shillings. It is all yours! No, not as a gift but as a loan if you prefer it! In any case take it and act on my advice. Go back to Liège by the midday train to-morrow, tell Madame Becque the whole truth, and depend upon it she will afford you shelter till you meet with another 'place' or perhaps (who knows!) be jolly glad to give you a fair salary and re-estate you in your former position in her own school!"

The speaker was a dark-haired, bright-eyed English girl who had cemented a warm friendship with the sad young teacher almost from the first moment of Georgie's transference to her present quarters, and who was now seated on the edge of Miss Sinclair's bed in the long, dreary dormitory where she had been aiding the unhappy girl to "pack" and arrange her scanty effects with a view to the morrow's exodus.

After long hours of argument and consultation Georgie had no choice but to accept at once the generous offer and sage advice of her friend and counsellor; yet it was, indeed, with a heavy heart and sad misgivings that she ultimately decided to retrace her steps to Liège and seek a haven once again in the scholastic establishment she had quitted but a few weeks previously.

"But who knows!" cried Amy Rossiter, with a sudden burst of inspiration. "There may be more flowers or bonbons awaiting you from the usual anonymous source—if, indeed, he may not ere this have put in an appearance on the scene (as he threatened) in *proprio personâ*! To tell the truth, Georgie, I have not much patience with you on this score. I cannot understand why, if as you say, your interest is still lively in that most delightful of fellow-travellers, you should have taken such fatally effective precaution to elude him, should he, indeed, repair to Liège and Madame Becque's in search of your most undeserving self!"

"Have I not told you, Amy, that he at length confessed himself a lord—a real, live, English lord? I would have you ponder well the true significance of those words," Georgie retorted, warmly, whilst a tall-tale colour mounted to her pale cheek. "A British peer and a poor, wretched pupil-teacher—did Fate ever chance to throw together a more incongruous pair?"

"He did not seem to note any fatal incompatibility between the two, nevertheless and notwithstanding!" returned Miss Rossiter, maliciously, "and surely he is the best judge of—"

"Amy! I have not yet made full confession of the humiliating truth. Lord Grafton is still ignorant of the ignominious position I occupied at Madame Becque's. I'm ashamed to admit that I—I allowed him to assume that—that it was in order to complete my studies I was taking up my residence for a twelvemonth in a continental school. I don't remember that I was guilty of absolute untruth, yet surely a direct evasion of facts amounts to pretty much the same thing! I lacked courage (how I hate myself for such perversities, as I glance back!) to make a clean breast of it. I told him my father had been unfortunate in business, and that I—I was consequently dispirited and unhappy; that and much more—but I did not, could not, tell this singularly kind friend (this English nobleman!) that the girl he had so signally and unaccountably distinguished was doomed to earn her bread in the degrading capacity of pupil-teacher in a foreign school!"

"It was wrong, foolish, unworthy,—what you will! yet, indeed, I could not speak the hateful words. I struggled more than once to give them voice, but strength failed me, and they expired unspoken on my lips."

"Ah! you are shocked, amazed—I can see it in your eyes. But don't utterly condemn me, Amy. Remember, I never for one moment

contemplated the possibility of—of his bestowing a thought on me once we had said good-bye. Why, therefore, should I take this stranger, whom I might never see again, into my confidence, I argued, mentally! Once I was settled at Madame Beque's, however, and—anonymous floral offerings (respecting which I have already made confession) began to arrive from time to time, why then, I perceived all too clearly (for in truth I know not whether the assurance gave me more of joy or pain!) that my fellow-traveller had not forgotten me, and in all probability might—might even—

"Might even come in search of you in *propre* person, ere the twelvemonth had expired," flattered Miss Rosier, declaiming, seeing that her companion hesitated, whilst the vivid colour mounted to her cheeks, and great tears gathered in her eyes; "in which case I should say you would have every reason to esteem yourself the most fortunate of your sex, whilst humanity at large—"

"Amy!" interrupted the elder girl, almost passionately, covering her face with both white trembling hands, and rocking herself slowly backwards and forwards as she spoke. "Amy! do you not see the absolute horror of—of the situation? Had he, indeed, appeared as I hoped, as I feared, nay, as I felt assured, he would," she went on, raising her head proudly, and looking full into her companion's eyes, "only to discover that the girl to whose memory he had been faithful for a whole long year was utterly unworthy of his friendship and esteem, much less of—of his love! For some intuitive consciousness whispers, Amy, that this gallant English nobleman has actually bestowed upon me something warmer than mere regard."

"Why, otherwise, should he have taken infinite trouble to furnish me with such constant and tangible reminders of his existence from time to time! Imagine, then (had I remained at Madame Beque's) his probably arriving at the specified time to discover that the girl who had so strangely captivated and riveted his fancy had practised upon him a base deception, in that she had allowed him to assume her social position was other than in truth it was, that the barrier between them was less insuperable than it is; in short, that he, a peer of the realm, had been deluded into cherishing the remembrance of a miserable pupil-teacher—a salaried mental—a being infinitely degraded and less fortunate than an honest English servant!"

"It was to avoid any such humiliating possibility that I fled (well-nigh in disgrace) from the asylum which had sheltered me for so long; for even Madame Beque's life-long resentment and animosity might be sooner borne, it seemed to me, than the hateful *dénoûment* I so dreaded!"

"Pooh!" asserted Amy, loftily. "I think far better of his lordship than you are pleased to do! He loves you, that is evident, and, loving you, would not have overwhelmed you with invidious and reproach (as you so readily conclude) had he even discovered your real rank in life. However, it is useless discussing all that now. You chose to fly, when, at all costs, you should have remained; in which case, who knows! ere now your life-long fate might have been decided, either for weal or woe! It is, however, futile to dwell upon 'what might have been' at the present crisis of affairs. The danger (if danger it were!) is past. Lord Grafton has either already put in an appearance at Madame B.'s and learnt the truth respecting you, or you alarmed yourself unnecessarily, and his constancy has not survived the ordeal of a whole long year. In either case, he is no longer an obstacle in your path, for the appointed date is past, and if he has not already visited and departed in peace, in due course, from your late quarters, rest assured he will not trouble himself further on your account, so you may return to Liège and seek Madame Beque's assistance and advice undisturbed by any hopes or fears in connection with your aristocratic admirer!"

George was fain to admit the justice of her sage young friend's observations, yet it was with a heavy heart and strange forebodings of impending evil that she shook the dust of Madame Dudent's establishment from off her feet the

following evening and repaired—solitary, sad, and weary—to the vast, busy, bustling railway station; there (with the money borrowed from her young companion) to book a place in a third-class carriage to Liège, where a doubtful reception at best awaited her.

Poor child! small wonder, her great, dark eyes were liquid with unshed tears, whilst her tremulous lips, cheeks and brow were white as the driven snow. An anguish and dread too deep for words (had there even been a friendly confidante at hand) just then internally convulsed her, but around were none save callous strangers—dark-browed, insolent foreigners before, behind, on either side, who jostled the shabby young Englishwoman heedlessly, or stared with cool impertinence beneath the brim of her well-worn felt hat. She felt terribly alone in that loud-voiced gesticulating throng, some rushing this way, others that, in haste to catch cabs, relatives, or their respective trains. George involuntarily shuddered as she paused one moment on the crowded platform; a bitter sense of isolation surged about her heart for a long breathing-space, leaving her cold and stunned and reckless. Naught, she reflected vaguely, mattered in a cruel, callous world where one was utterly alone!

Forgive her, reader! compassionate her! The battle of life was fierce for one whose summers were scarce eighteen!

CHAPTER VII.

"Is it—Is it possible!" she gasped, gazing wide-eyed, pallid tremulous, up into his face.

"More—it is a fact! and as our demonstration apparently proves insufficient, why then, let this—and this—carry conviction and a sense of certainty into the deepest depths of your incredulous heart!" and as he spoke the young man, who grasped both George's cold hands in his, as in a vice, suddenly bent his head, and there, beneath the rays of a flickering, glaring gaslight, surrounded by a mob of bearded, gaping foreigners, this stalwart, audacious Englishman pressed his moustached lips—once, twice, thrice—to those of the trembling girl.

"Lord Grafton! How—how dare you?"

"A man dares much, *chère amie*, believe me," he responded, with a smile infinitely tender, "when that for which he has yearned for a whole year is within his reach at last. Oh! George, it is useless struggling to be dignified, still less indignant, for I know—I know, dear girl, you are not indifferent to me, or you would not have fled from Madame Beque's to avoid a rencontre with one who—who loves you better than life itself! Ah! I am abrupt, no doubt!" he went on, eagerly, seeing the startled light dawn in the girl's great eyes, as he passed his strong arm about her, and led her, passive as a child, within the doors of a vast deserted waiting-room, where they sank down together, side by side, on a dusty, frowy, crimson couch; "but having perforce, lost a whole twelvemonth's happiness, one becomes impatient of a single moment's further waste of bliss, so I must tell you at once that I went in search of you to Liège, and—"

"And heard the truth!" she faltered, glancing up askance into his face.

"The whole, whole truth, dearest," he responded, fervently, "and, moreover, read between the lines; so explanations between us are unnecessary, George. I understand fully all that you would say—all that twelvemonths ago you left unsaid; and I came bustling off from good Mother Beque's to see you at Madame Dudent's. Yet, to think how nearly I missed you after all! Egad! if I'd turned out at the first door instead of the second, and thus avoided stumbling up against you, I should have been deposited at headquarters, it seems to me, only in time to learn that you had gone, and thus eluded me once more. But, thank Heaven! I have caught my little bird at last, and, George—Bah! don't talk to me of the danger of missing your train. I shall not set you free until—until you have given me one word of hope. Look

up into my eyes, love, and let me read my life-long sentence in your own! George, can you learn to love me? For not until you love me dare I ask whether my constancy may hope for the rich reward of your promise to be my wife!"

"Oh, Lord Grafton!" was all she could find voice to whisper (yet, happily her eyes were eloquent just then). "Is it possible that you can mean this? that you can forgive me for—the deception that I practised!"

"No!" the young man answered, fervently, as he bent his lips near her ear. "For if you had told me the truth—the whole truth, twelvemonths ago, the probabilities are we need not have wasted a long, interminable year. I thought you were a school-girl, and that I had, consequently, scarcely the moral right to make love to you; moreover, I wanted to try my own heart, for I fancied so sudden an infatuation might pass away, like many a former caprice. When I found however, that absence, on the contrary, but made my love for you grow stronger, I determined to endure the year's probation, then seek you, and if you gave me hope, refer the matter to your 'papa' in the orthodox style, in due course. Had you been quite, quite candid with me, dearest, I should have read the riddle of my own heart a right long since, for it was only when I heard the truth from Madame Beque's withered lips that I truly estimated the depth and fervour of my love. The horror, the anguish, the impotent despair, which seized me when I reflected upon the possible trials of your passion—alone, among strangers in a foreign land!—at once convinced me that I need no longer doubt or ponder, for my only chance of happiness, I realised forcibly, lay in the hope that you would promise to share my future life. George! it was to tell you this I took train at once. Let me have my answer from your own lips, here—now, without another minute's delay. Remember, I have already endured a year's unnecessary and interminable suspense! If my calculation be correct, one year to-day we parted on board the good ship *Python*."

It was the solitary reproach which ever passed Lord Grafton's lips, and George Sinclair pardoned it. Her exact reply need not be recorded here. I will content myself by saying that at the present moment no happier woman, no prouder wife, could well be found throughout the length and breadth of England than Georgina, Lady Grafton, who reigns at her husband's seat, Grafton Towers, loving and beloved.

This fortunate pair never fail to take an annual trip abroad; but surely it is strange, as many aristocratic "friends" observe, that they invariably visit a spot so unattractive as Liège; but Lord and Lady Grafton smilingly vow "it is a most delightful spot—rich in associations and historic memoirs."

[THE END.]

So pronounced is the success of artificial silk that English mills are taking it up, and a large amount of machinery now idle is to be put to work weaving it. There has been a good deal of question as to the relative strength of the natural and artificial product. Experiments have been made which show that the latter has about 80 per cent. of the former, but the manner of working is quite different. Those who have worked with the artificial fibre are surprised at the exquisite colours produced. They take dye much more readily than the natural silk. Another peculiarity is the extremely rich and high lustre of the fabric. Of course, the cloth made from artificial fibre will be less durable than the genuine thread of the silkworm, but it is promised in much less expensive grades, and when once the factories and mills are fully at work; it is claimed that prices will be wonderfully reduced, so much so, indeed, that everybody can afford to wear silk.

"THE HUMAN HAIR: Its Restoration and Preservation." A Practical Treatise on Baldness, Greyness, Superfuous Hair, &c. 40 pages. Post-free six stamps, from Dr. EORN, Hair Specialist, Bourne-mouth.

GEORGE TREHEARNE.

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It is the height of summer, and Helen, the daughter of John Bowers, the owner of the "Fox and Hounds," in a Yorkshire village, is standing at the open door, with the hot sun-rays streaming on her strangely beautiful face.

Tall, above the common height of women, she holds her straw hat by her side, so that her chestnut hair, curving back from her clear, pale face, glistens ruddily.

Watch the keen, grey eye with its soft lashes, as she looks warily round, and note the lines of her rich, large mouth as she steps buoyantly away.

People with such lips are rare—happily, perhaps; and those who own them are commonly resolute, often successful, not seldom unscrupulous.

She walks steadily towards the small clump of trees, here called a wood, and ponders the results of a recent action.

She is not a girl to do many things rashly, to take a false step with her eyes open—at least, not yet.

Some day, may be, Helen Bowers will love, and then she will feel the strength of a power greater even than her will.

In the wood is George Trehearne, the Oxford student, who has come here to study hard, for he has much wasted time to make up, and now he has a spur to exertion.

A college friend told him of a quiet place where a man could get through a lot of good work in the Long Vacation, so George has only made a short stay in the little town where his father is the leading doctor.

Bracing himself to some purpose, he has left his two fond sisters, the aunt who spoils him, and the schoolboy brother, and started to work at Greek and Latin, logic and history, in distant Yorkshire.

A typical young Englishman, strong in body and well stocked with brains—even if he does lack self-control and is too keenly alive to the few things that commend themselves to his rather exacting taste.

Some would say that a squarer jaw and less rounded outline of feature would be better signs for a man's future welfare, but those who love him say that no change must be even suggested.

He looks towards the country road, and then flings aside the book he is reading, for coming steadily towards him is Helen Bowers.

"There's a figure and a face and a mind, too, for which a man can rightly give more than Jacob's labour for Rachel."

For George Trehearne is utterly, blindly, in love with Helen. He loves her with a deep, steady, ever-growing passion, which no show of indifference, nor banter, nor open encouragement of his unsuspecting rival, Sir Everard Courtney, can abate one jot or tittle.

What does it matter, he thinks, smilingly, if Sir Everard, the wealthy, good-natured owner of Storches Hall and the broad acres stretching all round, comes to the "Fox and Hounds" very often and hangs so attentively on Helen's words?

"Why, Sir Everard is fifty, well told, and, like many gentlemen of that age, talks to every pretty girl he meets. But," thinks George, "she comes to meet me, to bring me my answer before I go back to work and Oxford," for little work has he done while wooing proud Helen.

"Helen! my Helen, whatever your answer!" he cries, grasping her hand as she steps calmly up to him. "How glorious you look to-day! Tell me now, quickly, what you have decided! I feel that I have won—that you have come to say that you'll be my wife, my beautiful, clever, darling wife. Say, am I right, Helen?" He finishes with eager eyes and parted lips.

"You are right, George Trehearne," she replies, slowly, with her steady gaze full on him. "I have come to say I will be your wife."

"And you love me, Helen!" asks George, not satisfied with this too precise answer.

"Love you, George!" she replies, vehemently.

"Should I come here if I did not? By this time you ought to know I am not given to soft words and sweet phrases."

"Yes, Helen, I know your proud nature. Heaven never made pride like it. Now, my love, you'll let me take my first kiss; you will, won't you, darling!" he says, dropping into loving language.

She pauses a moment before speaking, and then breathes a low "Yes," and her face hardens just a little.

Eagerly he clasps her in both arms and presses the supple form to him, and covers the passive lips with hot kisses.

She yields, indeed, but does not return his embrace; rather, she seems to endure the touch of his lips on her smooth cheeks.

Little cares George. He has his love now, all his doubts are over, and he does not expect his proud, reserved sweetheart to put aside her pride though she has pledged herself.

After some time, too short for George, spent in love-making, she leans against the low branch of a large elm, and says, firmly:

"You understand, George, I must have the money at once. I must go to Holmleigh when you leave, and the money will pay a servant for father and pay my expenses with Miss Bland. There's no time to be lost. If I am to be what your wife should, I must have the manners and education of your station. I am not going to be sneered at, patronised and despised by your lady friends. You'll give me the money to-night?"

"Yes, my love, to-night. Don't talk about money now," he says. "Let me have only the pleasure that I've waited for so patiently."

"Not so very patiently," she says, with a rare smile. "Are you very happy, George?" she asks, in a softer tone.

"Too happy for words," he replies.

"Tell me, George, if you saw the future before you now, black and miserable—you not having married me; suppose I have died—would you give me back my promise?"

"No, Helen, no! not if the future were to be one long torture! Helen, your love is all to me, life and fame, home and family; you are my life. I've nothing beyond you, nothing apart from you. But what a question to ask now! You are so strange at times. Helen, you make me shudder. Do you know of anything to spoil our future?"

"No, nothing; it was only a sudden thought—a fancy. Don't fear, George; I've your word, you've mine. As you keep your part, so will I mine," says Helen, in her former tone.

"You will write to me at Anselm College, dear. I go away two days from now. You'll write to me to say how you go on, and all that you think; perhaps, Helen, you'll not be so reserved on paper! I'll write every day," says George, fervently.

"And I, once a week," says Helen, coldly.

Perhaps the implied reproach on her want of affection had annoyed her. Anyhow, she would not consent to writing more than one letter each week, and with that George had to be satisfied.

"I must go back or father'll miss me," she says, soon after.

"Not yet, Helen," he pleads. "Stay a few minutes. Recollect I've not had my new love long."

"You'll spoil everything with your weakness," she returns. "You know well enough father mustn't suspect anything of this, or our love-making will be stopped. You've heard him say often enough that his daughter shall marry no one higher than her father, and what he says he means!" and she moved from the tree.

"You shall have the hundred pounds to-night. I'll put the notes in a letter I'll give you to post, so no one will know," explains George.

"You are very good, George—too good for me."

And then this proud woman lifts her lips to his, and really gives her fond lover an unsought kiss.

The next moment Helen Bowers is returning to the "Fox and Hounds" as self-possessed as when she started for this strange troth-plighting.

So George Trehearne returned to Oxford a full

month before the long vacation ended, wrenched himself away from the delights of a love still young and fresh, and gave himself up to the books he had neglected for rare Helen Bowers.

On the river, there called Isle, later by another name known to all races of men, he would scull his skiff each evening into some reed-fenced back-water, where the sharp cry of the peewit was the only sound beside that of the stream rippling against his boat, which mingled with his thoughts of Helen in quiet Holmleigh.

He would write out in his pocket-book the choicest bits of classic love-verse, and alter them to fit the new Helen. Rarely did he find her described by these old writers on love. Each other type of woman they knew, and the strokes of their skilled hands wanted little changing to make the likeness of most modern maidens.

Helen alone seemed to have escaped them; she was beyond their experience, George thought, till one day he came across four nameless lines, where her very essence seemed to dwell.

Swiftly he had them by heart, then in English words, in English verse, and then he turned to the book of some old scholar where the unnamed subject of the lines was identified.

"No, not she!" was his cry, when he found that the Latin writer was speaking of a woman even more infamous for her character than worshipped for her splendid beauty.

One of Helen's letters put the memory of this resemblance out of his head, and the return of students soon left him too busy to brood over the matter.

Trehearne was changed, everyone said—reading hard, and meant to come out high on the class lists.

"Odds he gets honour," says Lasterly, who has to give long points.

"Even his first-class," says another, taken to five pounds by that cool hand, Burroughes.

Helen's letters accumulate, and mark the three months gone so smoothly. She is just as proud on paper, says little of her own feelings, much of her progress, and makes George exclaim in admiration of her sketches of her friends and fellow-townsmen. Examination in a few days now; and then freedom, love, and Helen.

One morning George is delighted at seeing an unexpected letter from his sweetheart; he presses the envelope, and as he detects an enclosure, cries,—

"The likeness at last!"

Joyously he opens it, draws out the enclosure—two cards linked with silver silk. Puzzled, he reads the name on the first.

"Sir Everard Courtney! What does Helen send this for! The old boy married again. Well, he waited long enough. Who is it!"

He turns to the other card, and these words dance in lines of fire before his eyes,—

"Lady Courtney (Miss Helen Bowers)."

Pooh! his sight's queered by reading; it's a mistake—he's read the words wrongly! He brushes the card with his hand, and still the neat characters remain, and still they look red before him. With cold hands he turns again to the envelope. A letter which contains something folded in it. From Helen—the longest she has ever written; the folded paper is a note for a hundred pounds!

Slowly, spite of his battling, it is forced on him that this woman has deceived him, played with his love, and married his rival—old, but wealthy—sold herself for her ambition, for rank and power, station and influence.

How firmly she writes! How well she tells her tale!

"Felt that she did not love him as he deserved, and that her's was a nature requiring a man of riper age to guide it."

"Riper age, indeed!" he muttered, "when you take the man who is only not called a fool because he's a landowner! Bah, Helen! you should have spared your reasons! Oh, my Helen! my cursed Helen! you've wrecked me! I've worked for you and your love; I can work for nothing else. You send my money back; you tell me your marriage was necessarily secret; and, great Heaven! you ask for my friendship! If ever in my life you come in my power, beware! Perhaps my love was weak; you

shall see what my revenge will be! Oh, Helen! Helen! my glorious darling. I did love you!—I love you still! Why have you broken my heart! Oh, my Helen!"

And George Trehearne, shaken by a storm of grief, lays his head on his books, and gives himself up to such a sorrow as comes to few men.

That day he sent back the note, saying it was a free gift. Let Lady Courtney keep it in memory of one she will see but once again—when or how he did not say.

Pride urged him to work with feverish energy; and at last he comes out in the first class, and Borroughes loses, and the father who has scraped and saved from the proceeds of his Hampshire practice to send his son to Oxford is a happy man that day; and George Trehearne's name is on the lips of every one in the little town, and many expected he would do well, and more knew him since he was "so high,"—a height indicated by the head of the speaker.

When the lists are out he leaves for Paris, runs across home for Christmas, and back again to Paris.

Dr. Trehearne says George has done too much work, and must take a holiday; and if he likes Paris best, why they'll spare him from home, though they had hoped to have him all the Christmas time, particularly after his leaving so soon in the Long Vacation.

And George Trehearne returns to Paris, and writes very seldom. He does not go up to Oxford next term.

The doctor hears strange stories of his son, and snatches two days to run over to the gay city. He comes back, and says little of his visit. Why tell the old story? A man has been fooled by a cold and clever woman; he holds himself for a time, and then goes down hill at the devil's pace. Heaven cure him soon! prays the poor father, stricken in the hour of his triumph.

A year goes, and George still wanders over Europe. He does not trouble those in England for money, for he makes something by the wild and bitter novel he writes; and his friend, the Duc de Laverne, keeps a good house, and won't be parted from the brilliant Englishman, so different from the dull samples of John Bull M. le Duc has hitherto seen.

Another year and yet another go. The Duc de Laverne has found out a darling Greek now. George Trehearne has long left France, come to London, lived wild, and taken to drink.

He writes still at times, and so just keeps body and soul together. He will not ask help from the sad father whose name he has made the subject of so many disreputable scandals; let his sisters forget him, and let Harry go to Cambridge that he may not hear of the other Trehearne.

Then comes the illness brought on by drink and late hours, and little food, and then the hospital, and afterwards the seaside, having no money, no strength to work, and worse than no name.

He gets a little work in copying Greek for the local parson, and then, feeling stronger after a month's sober living, joins a travelling booth, which comes to utter failure in the depth of winter at a town in Lincolnshire.

Through that long and cold time he tramps from casual ward to workhouse or infirmary, and one day finds that his next "hotel" is in a familiar village in the Yorkshire Wolds.

On that February evening, when the twilight lingered long on the earth's white garment of snow, a pale and ragged tramp stood hesitating at the cross-roads, one of which he knew to lead to Holmleigh, whence a long private road brings the visitor to Storthes Hall.

Shall he go! It's only a mile or so longer, and there's plenty of time. He has not seen her for years—does not wish to see her; but he will climb the parapet above the old gate, and have a look at her grand house. He feels strong now; he has had no drink since the show stopped. Only one thing does he carry about with him—a card from which hangs a wisp of silver silk.

He will go. And starts tramping sturdily, seeing the ones well-known country, now bleak and cold, rolling away in huge snow waves into the dull white of the distant sky line.

Bitterly he thinks of the old time, and coming to the entrance to the private road, clammers the

low gate, and crunches the smooth snow under his shapeless boots, coming as silently as sudden death.

"There is no danger, Cyril. No one knows Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, of the Grand Hotel, Paris, are—"

"Hush, Nellie!" says a man's voice.

"Captain Devenish and Lady Courtney," the lady continues.

"Her voice!" says the tramp, as the words travel in the cold, still air, her voice with a new, strange tone in it. He listens close to the thick wall, and then strikes the dull brick as he hears the words "My Cyril!" borne on a long love-sigh.

So this man calls his Helen Nellie—poor Trehearne had never dared to use the pet name. And she, the cool, scheming, ambitious woman, has now loved and seems to rejoice in her guilt.

What a depth of worship and love went into that brief "My Cyril!" Ah, these strong women, when they do give their hearts they know no limits!

They are walking on now, and the tramp hears her dress rustle against the bushes; and then seeing ahead the old gate, now railed up, he hastens on to catch a glimpse of her. He peers cautiously over the stone parapet; they have not passed, a glance behind shows him they are coming.

Down in the snow he crouches, and then as they reach the middle of the gateway he climbs on to the parapet and looks at them moving slowly at the edge of the sloping ground.

She is splendidly beautiful as ever. Her lover is a big man with handsome, stupid features.

Suddenly they turn and stop before he can jump down.

"Who's that fellow, Nellie!" asks Captain Devenish, pointing with his whip at the pale and ragged figure holding the railings.

Lady Courtney looks at the "fellow," and knows George Trehearne at once, despite his wild eyes and ragged beard.

"Go, Cyril! Go! leave me!" she cries. "No, Cyril, one kiss!" and she clasps him round the neck and kisses him again and again. "Now go!" she says; "leave me to deal with this man."

Her strong will again dominates, and Captain Devenish walks steadily towards the place where his groom and horse are waiting. He turns to glance at his imperious mistress, and she waves him onward with a gesture of command.

For awhile they look at each other in silence.

"Lady Courtney, or Mrs. Thornton," says the tramp lover, "once again you see me. Lady Courtney—Mrs. Thornton—Helen Bowers—oh! cruel, false, and lying love, my time is come! You wrecked my youth, my manhood, and my life. See what I am—a nameless tramp, and you the honoured wife of Sir Everard Courtney. Honour! No! Dishonoured wife! I heard and I know. As you spared me so will I you. Your lover is called Captain Devenish, is he? And you say to him, 'My Cyril!' Bah! that's a man who has snared many foolish women, and you'll not be the last. Lady Courtney, your name will be the by-word of Yorkshire itself, in three days' time. Your stupid old husband shall be shamed in his own county by the innkeeper's daughter he made his wife. Helen, you were false to me, you are false to him, and the lover whose life you have blighted shall be false to you!"

Calmly she heard him till she lost sight of her new lover, calmly she waited for him to get on his road, and then she turned to her old lover.

"You've gone too far, George Trehearne!" she said; "you make yourself too dangerous!"

As she spoke she drew her hand from her muff, looked up at him fiercely, levelled a pistol, and fired.

A rattling of the rusty railings, a clutching of fingers, and a fall of a body into the snow.

The smoke curls from the barrel, the sound of the shot reaches Captain Devenish, but he hastens on.

Lady Courtney listens patiently.

No movement, no groan, no one for miles round to hear. No one in the disused back of Storthes Hall to see anything, even if the double row of old trees were not screen enough.

Calmly she returns to her room, looks up the pistol, greets her husband, and thinks she heard someone wild duck shooting at the rear!

After dinner she looks out from the conservatory, and catches [the fine snowflakes on her arm.

Thawing! Thank Heaven! Footmarks in lane and park will be melted away by to-morrow, Sunday. No one in the private road on that day. A watchful night, joyful with the sound of heavy rain falling on bare trees and rusty railings, and on a dead man lying in the snow.

The rain washes the blood from his lips and from his ragged coat, and, beating heavily downward, seems as if it would close his staring eyes, but falls utterly.

Lady Courtney slumbers lightly as the roaring wind arises, and the crashing of branches and trees tells of its course.

Sunday morning, calm and mild, with a promise of spring in the air.

From the conservatory Lady Courtney looks into the park strewn with breakage.

At the one spot she cannot avoid looking where two trees are uprooted, and the rusty railings which the dead man clutched can be counted from the Hall.

Next week, great excitement in the village. A tramp found murdered near Storthes Hall! No means of identification on the body except a blood-stained card with a silver silk thread on it. Zealous county constabulary remove the blood stains with a sharp knife and remove also the name below.

"No clue" is the official answer, an open verdict the judgment of the coroner's jury, and the unknown tramp is in death honoured as a county anecdote.

And Lady Courtney! Oh, she did her part well! Never a breath of suspicion on her, and her danger is soon over. But not her punishment!

The shot that saved herself killed one lover and lost another! Never a line, never a word, from Cyril Devenish! He had heard that shot, he knew she always carried a pistol with her, and he read of the murdered tramp. Not a man of high moral standard—but he could not continue to love a murderess. Of course, his mouth was closed—the secret was safe with him. Before that summer was over he had gone to India, where he spent the rest of his life.

A life-long punishment for Helen Courtney. She has lost the man she sinned for, and she is tortured by the kindly love of the husband she has deceived.

Long years after, a Christmas party assembles at Storthes Hall, and on one snowy night a young man tells a budget of ghost stories to amuse Lady Courtney's guests and children.

He is an observant young man, and perhaps prepares his stories! Rising suddenly, he draws the curtain from the window looking on the old railings, and continues, solemnly,—

"The man clung to the railings for a moment and then fell. At times he revisits the place, still seems to watch someone, to denounce, and then falls."

The children, fearful, crowd round, and the ladies look forth. Some persuade themselves they see the ghost, and others flirt with sceptical men.

"Lady Courtney—Mrs. Thornton—Helen Bowers—oh! cruel, false and lying love!" That's what he said. You've gone too far, George Trehearne! Thawing! Thank Heaven! Rain! Now I shall sleep! Cyril, my Cyril! not a word these long years!"

Such are the strange words that confuse and terrify Lady Courtney's guests. She is staring fixedly at the railings, and is utterly forgetful of her company.

"Always in the snow-time George comes," she says, quietly.

Lady Courtney, strong-willed woman as she was, lost her reason ultimately, and at Storthes Hall, the window looking on the railings is bricked up. None of the family refer to the story of the murder of George Trehearne.

DIANA'S DIAMONDS.

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CHAPTER XXII.

"You are enough to provoke a saint," I cried, drying my eyes angrily. "You ask me if I care for you, and when I do, you say I cannot know my own mind. You tell me you love me—yet I may not look upon myself as engaged. Oh, I thought having a—lover was different to this," and I again burst into tears and sobbed. "You will take nothing from me—neither my love, nor my money—or—or—anything."

"Diana, Rance, my dearest, if you knew my inmost thoughts you would pity me, and not make it harder for me to leave you than it is. I would give you my very life; but honour forbids me to claim anything from an innocent, ignorant girl like you. When I come back it may be different. You will be older, and a better judge of your own heart."

"And suppose you never come back?"

"Ah, it was just that chance that forced me to come here to-day. I felt that I could not go without seeing you—and I could not see you without letting you know the truth. I shall write, as you wish it now, and then you perhaps will write to me."

"Perhaps."

"Your aunt and Selina need not know of this conversation—at least Selina. Selina is most eccentric. She has a notion that I am in love with her—this mere notion will wear off. Last year it was Thompson, of the Blues, before that it was Green, of the Foreign Office. It will be someone else next month. There's nine o'clock—I must be going."

At this moment Stevens entered with lights, and as he set them about, and drew down the blinds, I was conscious that he cast more than one sharp glance at my pale and tear-stained face. This was a hint in time. I composed my countenance, for I knew that at any moment a thundering double knock might announce the return of the ladies of the house.

Hitherto—and all that long time—we had both been standing—now we sat down, I on the sofa, he on a neighbouring low chair. I knew that the precious moments were running away like sands out of an hour-glass—perhaps the last moments we should ever be together. The very thought was agony.

"Rance, you will stay here till I return! I will settle it all with my aunt. You need not be uneasy. You shall pay for your board and lodging. Knott shall settle it."

A loud double knock came to the door, and I started up, saying, in consternation,—

"There they are."

"Yes; say good-bye to me now, my darling, now, when we are alone," he exclaimed, also rising; and, in spite of his previous scruples he took me in his arms and kissed me. Yes, and I kissed him, and both our faces were wet with my tears.

A sound of gay talking, of footsteps on the stairs; and just as Mrs. Halford and Selina entered by one door I fled out through the back drawing-room by another, and was never missed.

The next morning I presented such a pale face and hollow eyes at breakfast time that Mrs. Halford was quite horrified. Luckily Selina, who was fatigued after the races, took her breakfast in bed, and I was spared the scrutiny of her too sharp eyes.

Mrs. Halford told me all about her nephew's sudden departure. How sorry she was—how shocked when she first heard the news. Was I not sorry! What a pity I had not seen him.

"I did see him last evening," I confessed, "and he told me. I am very sorry too."

"Yes; he takes such a great interest in you, and he has begged me to look after you till he returns, which we may hope will be in three or four months."

"It is very, very kind of you. But I know I am in the way here though you never allow me to feel it. I am an utter stranger, and you have been more than good to me. I think I ought to

live with Peggy instead of intruding any longer. Indeed, I think it will be best."

"It is no intrusion. We like your company, so don't say another word about it. Hugh has asked me to accept so much a month (£30) from your man of business. So remember you are under no compliment, in a monetary sense; and try and make yourself happy and at home here as long as you have to home of your own."

I spent two most miserable days, plunged in grief, which I was bound to conceal. One little ray of sunshine fell upon me on that bleak Saturday in the shape of a letter. Mary Ann brought it to me in bed.

It was more than a letter; it was a cabinet photo of Hugh, and a very good one.

How welcome! and my very own! Now I need no longer steal down and stare surreptitiously at those in the drawing-room.

"So you had a photo from Hugh this morning!" said Selina. "I knew his hand; and that is one of his South Sea photos, I am sure. Let me see it!"

Of course I brought down and displayed my treasure, but I made no reference to a little note that had been enclosed, and that I valued ten times more.

The transport sailed, and how eagerly we followed its outward passage. It touched at Gibraltar, Malta, and finally Alexandria.

From Malta I received a letter, a letter of three sheets, which I soon knew off by heart.

My visits to Peggy were now long and frequent; firstly, because she was soon going away, and, secondly, because I had made her my confidante.

She was my safety valve, and into her ear I poured all my joys and sorrows, and hopes and fears. I would sit with her by the hour, and talk to her about Hugh; and she proved an unwearied listener.

At length her cottage was ready to receive her, and she and Tony, to my great sorrow, took their departure from Lavender-place; but ere they did so I faithfully promised that before long I would contrive to pay them a visit in their country abode.

In Mowbray-street all went smoothly. Selina had now almost entirely forgotten Hugh, and had another cavalier in her train—a wealthy, elderly man, of low degree.

Now, Selina had blue blood in her veins and a distinguished presence.

Mrs. Halford was charmed with Selina's prospects, but mine were by no means so flourishing.

My uncle could not be prevailed on to part with my little pittance, despite all Mr. Knott's treaties and his own written agreements; and I had no money—a very unpleasant state of affairs.

Soon, I think, everyone knew the disagreeable fact—at any rate, the servants did. I felt it in their manner.

Mrs. Halford, kind as ever, was a trifle condescending—I am sure she did not mean it—and Selina—oh, Selina!—at once thrust me into the rôle of a poor relation.

She at first politely, then imperiously, asked me to do odds-and-ends of sewing, tacking in frills, mending gloves, and generally helping Mary Ann, the maid.

"I know you like to be useful," she said, "and you work so charmingly that I am really quite envious."

Consequently she kept me busily employed. I wrote notes for Mrs. Halford, went messages to the tradespeople, changed books at the library, and, in short, slowly but surely fell into the place of a hard-working, unpaid companion.

I was not at all unhappy—I hated idleness—and I was fifty times better off than I had been at "Rivals' Green."

Mrs. Halford herself never noticed how I had slid down in the social scale—how my services were at everyone's beck and call. I am sure if she had been asked she would have told any inquirer that I was treated as a daughter of the house. And so I was in one way. I had all the duties, but none of the dignities or pleasures.

Months elapsed since Hugh, and my heart, had sailed from Spithead. Christmas time came

round. Now and then, at long intervals, I had a letter from Hugh, which letters were like white stones in my cheerless life. I always now rose early, and took the precaution to empty the letter-box myself. His letters were dated from "Assouan," "Wady Halfa," and other well-known places, as he journeyed up to the relief of Khartoum.

As time went on Selina became more and more imperious. Little did she guess that it was the heiress of forty thousand pounds that she used to scold and browbeat and order about, and make lace her dress, and button her boots.

I felt a dismal satisfaction in the fact, and kept it religiously to myself. I had an odd kind of pleasure in working thus, as it were incognito, for Hugh's aunt and cousin.

A little after Christmas Selina was engaged to her wealthy admirer, and what a time of fuss and excitement ensued, for the wedding was to be soon.

What with dressmakers, milliners, ladies' outfitters, the house was like an hotel; and presents (as she was making a good match) poured in by every post.

No word had been spoken of Hugh till, one evening, Selina and I were sitting in the library alone. The last post had just come in, and quite a pile of parcels lay before the bride-elect, who was critically examining them by the light of a reading-lamp, and making comments to me as I sat opposite to her, sewing—for her as usual.

As she appraised some gifts highly, and called other offerings mean and paltry, she looked over at me and said,—

"Mr. Dodd is getting me a diamond parure. He says it is to cost five thousand pounds. He has ordered three carriages in Long-acre, and I am to have two pair of matched 'steppers,' price no object. How glad I am now that I did not think seriously of Hugh. Hugh is nice, but he is poor; and I am sure he would be shockingly jealous. This marriage of mine will be an awful blow to him; but he will get over it, like all men, and I hope some day, after a decent time of mourning, he will marry some nice rich girl. Why, what's this I have opened! A queer pair of Egyptian bracelets. Not bad; but surely Hugh does not know yet, and if he did he would not send me anything so shabby as a pair of little gold bangles, not worth more than ten pounds."

"You must remember that he is not rich," I timidly remarked.

"Why, I declare," she said, turning over the lid of the box, "they are for you. I opened it by mistake. And now will you please tell me"—and she half threw them at me—"what Captain Halford means by sending you presents? Here. Upon my word, this is very nice. 'Rance, with Hugh's love.' What does he mean, miss? I insist on knowing," she demanded, scarlet with passion.

"He means what he says, I suppose," I answered.

"Do you believe that he is in love with you?" she blazed across the table.

"Yes, I believe he is," I replied, with wonderful composure.

"And are you engaged to him, you little viper?"

"Miss Halford, you forget yourself. Do not go too far," I answered, impatiently.

"Answer me, once for all!" she nearly screamed as she rose to her feet.

"I do not see how it can concern you now."

"Yes, it does, most nearly. I shall not stand by and see my cousin degrade himself by a low match, and marry a wretched little, white-faced, adventuress he picked up out of the gutter, and brought home in the middle of the night. I won't allow it, I say!" she nearly screamed. "No one knows who you are. You belong to no one but a disreputable, drunken, swindling old man—your uncle."

"Captain Halford knew my father."

"And what of that? Captain Halford is not going to be allowed to marry you, and make a fool of himself, especially when my future husband is most sensitive about low connections."

"I am surprised at that," I retorted, coolly.

"His father was a working miner—than which nothing can be lower."

"Pray keep your impertinent remarks for your own class, and tell me one thing. Are you engaged to my cousin, Captain Halford, or not?" she inquired, in a trembling tone.

"I am not engaged to your cousin, Captain Halford—at present."

"And yet you receive letters and presents from him! You have disgraced yourself, you intriguing girl. I shall tell my mother that I do not consider you are a proper inmate for our establishment. You will have to find yourself other quarters."

"Who is to find other quarters?" said a voice beside us, and looking up we beheld Mrs. Halford in the room, spectacles on nose, key-basket in hand.

She had entered unobserved, and gazed in blank astonishment at our flashing eyes and flushed, angry faces—I sitting, and Selina standing; and, as it were, towering over me.

"I am," I returned, promptly. "Miss Halford has just told me my conduct is disgraceful—that I am not fit to stay under this roof, and that I am a viper."

"So she is!" cried Selina. "Only fancy, I have discovered that she receives letters and presents from Hugh all on the sly. Only think of it, mother!"

"Is this true, Diana?" demanded Mrs. Halford, stiffly.

"It is true that I have had four or five letters from Captain Halford, and that these bangles just received are a present from him."

"Upon my word, Hugh must be mad! Is it really possible that Hugh has been making a cat-paw of his old aunt, and brought in an adventuress with a lie! Who are you, girl?"

"I am just what I have stated, and what Captain Halford has vouched for. I wished him to tell you that he—he—liked me; but he said time enough when he returned. We are not engaged, nor bound to one another. He would not hear of it!" I stammered out, rather fearfully.

"What—what do you mean?"

"He would not allow me to consider myself bound to him, lest I might change my mind before I came of age. I begged him to consider that I never would change; but he would not allow me to pledge myself. It was his doing."

"And why was he so obdurate, and you so pressing?" she asked, with indignant scorn.

"Ah! why, indeed! He will tell you the reason of that himself," I replied. "The day after to-morrow I shall cease to make any further demand on your kind hospitality if you will permit me to remain till then, in order to prepare Peggy for my visit, and to pack up my wardrobe." With this remark I rose, having folded up my work with trembling hands, locked my box, collected my bangles; and, with a slight bow, I straightway departed with all the dignity that I could assume.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AFTER our recent stormy scene I was rather nervous about appearing in the breakfast-room next morning; however, I summoned up courage and ventured down, and found Mrs. Halford reading the *Morning Post* as I entered. For some moments she did not lay it down, nor reveal her face, nor speak to me. All the time she was making up her mind to say something. Selina was breakfasting in bed as usual.

"Diana," said my hostess, at length—"I am sorry we both—I mean you and I—spoke so hastily last night. If my nephew intends to make you his wife he is old enough to know his own mind, and I have no reason, as far as you are personally concerned, to find fault with his choice. You are pretty and ladylike; and if you are not accomplished, at any rate you are useful. The great drawback to the match in my eyes is your want of any respectable connections and money. I speak frankly, and without any wish to give you pain, my dear."

"Yes, Mrs. Halford, your objections are not frivolous ones. As far as money goes, I may tell you that I have good prospects, though at present I am penniless. As to creditable

connections, no one regrets my want of them as much as I do myself."

"Have you no people on your mother's side?"

"No, I have never heard of them," shaking my head.

"Well, if it is as you say between you and Hugh, you had better remain here. He left you in my charge, and I consider myself responsible for your maintenance."

"Thank you, Mrs. Halford, but I would like to go to Peggy. I am thinking of starting by the first train to-morrow. I have long promised her a visit."

"You cannot go at present. Look at all the things I have to do before the wedding. And you are invaluable with your needle, and have made yourself so useful I could not spare you, and I am sure you would not leave me at such a pinch."

"But Miss Halford can easily dispense with me and my services; and, to tell the honest truth, I should be glad of a holiday."

"A holiday. My dear Diana, one would think to hear you talk you were a—a—servant!"

"Well, frankly, Mrs. Halford, I am little better, if you think it over. For the last six months you will find that I have been a kind of housekeeper and under lady's maid."

Mrs. Halford became red to the tip of her nose.

"You are frank with me, and I shall return the compliment. Who gives out stores, adds up tradespeople's books, arranges flowers, dusts the best china ornaments, goes messages, mends the house linen, makes your caps, and darns your lace? I do. Who sits at home alone, when you and Miss Halford go out day after day? I do. Who effaces herself when you have visitors, or expect company? Who walks to church, sooner than crush you in the carriage? I do. Consequently, as you will see, I fulfil all the offices of an unpaid companion. I admit that I have undertaken them ungrudgingly, but I am not going to stir over the fact that I have undertaken them, nor to pretend that I have done these tasks from mere pleasure. Discipline is good for me, and my stay here has, I hope, profited me much. I am not ungrateful to you for your protection, but I would like a change, and will, if you please, still carry out my intention of going down to Kenb to-morrow, and staying with Peggy."

Mrs. Halford sat in silence, my speech had hit her hard, and she was figuratively stunned. I opened her eyes somewhat rudely to the fact that I was not, as she told herself and her gossip—"a poor girl living on charity,"—but an upper servant serving without wages.

"You are a rude, bold girl to speak in such a way to a woman of my age; but I believe there is truth in what you say. You placed yourself in the background, and we have accepted you at your own valuation. I am sorry now that I have been so much taken up with Selina's affairs that I have only thought of her. When I did think of you it was as a useful, willing girl, whom chance had thrown on my hands for an indefinite time. Why did you not rebel when you found your quarters so irksome?"

"I never found them irksome till last evening when your daughter opened my parcel by mistake and then insulted me when she discovered the contents."

"Do not mind her. Selina has her weakness—we all have ours. Here is that almost every man she speaks to falls in love with her. I never shared her belief, least of all about Hugh. He knows her far too intimately; besides, he has no money. I wonder how he intends to support you if you are my future niece!"

To this I made no reply, and presently she added,—

"At least, let us part on good terms, Diana."

"Certainly, and to show that I bear you no ill-will, and mean what I say, I shall go up now and finish sewing the muslin covers on the chairs in the back drawing-room, for I left them only half done yesterday."

"Well, if you are sure you don't mind, and

have time. If you want the carriage you can have it at two o'clock."

"Thanks; I should be very glad of it, for I wish to see Mr. Knott."

I meant to leave my diamonds in his hands and give him my address.

Having dashed off a note to Peggy I went upstairs, and was soon hard at work in the back drawing-room kneeling before various chairs and couches, and adorning them with muslin and lace anti-macassars, caught up with china silk scarves of orange red and blue, according to the very latest fashion.

As I thus knelt and sewed two young ladies were shown into the front room—friends of Selina, who presently tripped down from her bower, and joined them in the highest spirits. She had a large light blue velvet jewel-case in her hand, and could scarcely contain her triumph as she displayed its contents to their astonished eyes.

I could see its contents also—a diamond rivière and three stars for the hair; all very fine and very bright—a present from her intended.

After this gift had been discussed, and tried on, and admired, they fell to talking of the wedding-day, the trousseau, and the other presents; and I, who could hear almost every single word, was moved to both amusement and anger at the coarse and open way in which Selina triumphed over her two unengaged future bridesmaids.

After a long while one of them asked "who I was?" in a low voice, as I was now working well within sight and earshot, though I kept my face turned away from view, and made myself as unobtrusive as possible.

"A poor hanger-on of mother's. Hugh picked her up and brought her here, and said she was an ill-used orphan, that she had a little money, and asked mother to shelter her till her affairs were settled. Her affairs never have been settled, and here she has stayed for six months, and is likely to remain."

"Miss Halford," I said, standing in the open door-way, "I could not help hearing what you have said; but you have omitted to tell your friends one piece of good news, which is, that I am taking my departure to-morrow." I glanced at them as I spoke.

"I declare!" said one of them, returning my gaze with interest, "I believe you are the girl with the wonderful diamonds! Oh, Selina," with a spile of malice, "you never saw such diamonds."

"Irish diamonds, I should think, if any," said Selina, with a sneer that was not at all becoming.

"Are you the girl we saw at the theatre—the girl who wore the necklace that everyone was looking at?" persisted my questioner.

"Yes, I suppose so," I admitted, rather reluctantly.

"And where did you get those wonderful diamonds?"

"They were given to me—they belonged to an Indian princess."

"And are they still in your possession?"

"Yes."

"And Selina, do you mean to say that you have never seen them?" cried my questioner, breathlessly.

Selina laughed scornfully, and said,—

"No, and I won't believe in them until I do—seeing is believing."

I do not know what influenced me most, the urgent request of this girl, Miss Erie, to produce them, or Selina's contemptuous disbelief, or my own firm desire to cast off my Cinderella character, and to appear in my own, at the eleventh hour—to appear and triumph!

I was not long in going upstairs, and returning with a box in my hand, a very plain one, with a patent lock. From its common exterior no one would have expected to see its valuable contents; and Miss Halford, as she fingered her own dainty jewel-case, said, with ill-concealed amusement,—

"Well! now let us see these wonderful diamonds!"

"First open yours!" I said, "and we will lay

them side by side and compare them on this red velvet cover."

Selina, only too glad once more to feast her eyes, slowly touched a spring, threw back the lids and showed her new parure—a very moderate and respectable one, such as one sees in every jeweller's shop in Oxford and Regent-streets. Nothing wonderful, and outside value about twelve hundred pounds. Selina gazed at them rapturously, fingered them affectionately, and finally laid them out with much exhilaration on the velvet table before her, saying, as she concluded their disposal,—

"Now for yours!"

From the tone of her voice mine were apparently very small fry indeed—probably paste! Indeed the box and outer wrapping were poor and unpromising, and not so common; but when I quickly rolled off the inner covering, and laid bare my treasure down on the table, a simultaneous cry of admiration broke from the two Miss Eries, and Selina sat staring in incredulous amazement, as if her eyes were about to depart from their sockets.

Her poor little necklet was as completely extinguished by the Begum's diamonds as a match-light is quenched by the sun.

She sat for fully three moments in silence, then she put out a timid finger and touched the Evil Eye; then she slowly ejaculated in a faint voice,—

"Well, I never!"

This exclamation demanded no reply, and no one spoke. At length she turned to me and said, tremulously,—

"What does this mean—who are you?"

"Simply the owner of these diamonds," I rejoined, coolly gathering them up and stowing them away.

"They must be worth a fortune!"

"Fifteen thousand pounds, I believe."

"Gracious!" another pause. As time was precious, and I had much to do, and no leisure, like my three silent and stupefied companions, I put my box under my arm, and with a little bow to the two strangers, left them to their own company.

The following day—thanks to Mr. Knott's advance of money—saw me speeding down to Kent to stay with Peggy, and thanks to the influence of my wonderful diamonds Mrs. Halford was affectionate, Selina subdued, deprecating, apologetic. They actually drove me to the train, and loaded me with books, papers, sandwiches, and a flask of sherry—parted with me reluctantly, and Mrs. Halford kissed me (Selina could not well do this, having so recently called me a "viper"), and they both implored me to soon return. All of which attentions, caresses and warm invitation I most properly attributed to the importance that had accrued to me, as the proprietress of an almost fabulous diamond necklace!

Such is life!

CHAPTER XXIV.

I HAD enjoyed two distinct experiences connected with money. In my first time I had been the victim of my fortune—the prey of the spoiler. My second I had seen the reverse of the shield, and been made to feel the inconsequence of appearing as a pauper. I had gone from one extreme to the other.

Now, at Peggy's I believed that I should hit the happy medium, and be neither persecuted nor patronised. Peggy received me with open arms at the nearest station to Brayfield, the village near which she lived, and drove me home in triumph in the only Brayfield fly, and proudly conducted me into her extremely snug and picturesque abode.

It was a cottage two stories high, covered with ivy and Virginia creeper, and it stood back from the road in a garden of considerable size.

"Yes; it's a nice genteel, little place!" she remarked, as we drove up; and I praised its outward appearance. "It was Tony's choice. You see he is a Brayfield man, and he always had his eye on this cottage. If I had been choosing I'd have been more inclined for a bit of

a place out beyond Donnybrook—or maybe a nice little lodge at Bray—that we could let in the summer for sea-bathing."

"I'm sure this is twice as good, Peg!" I replied, as I viewed the red-tiled hall, the cosy sitting-room, with a roaring fire, the showy tea-table and the steaming kettle, and the appetising hot cakes. "Andy is bringing in your box, my child, and just come up and take off your hat, and look round your room! It's not what I like for you; but it is clean and comfortable—if nothing else!"

I ascended the winding, cracking stairs, and found my room went the whole length of the cottage—from back to front, and that it had a window at each end, which made it cheerful—even on this grey wintry afternoon.

A bright fire burned in the grate, and winter flowers stood on the toilette table. Clean and comfortable! It was more; it was quite luxurious, and I was sure that Peggy must have spent a considerable sum in furnishing the room expressly for me—and I said as much.

"And if I did! Did we not make every farthing in your father's service! and did he not leave us a fine fortune? And where and how could we spend it better!" cried Peggy, indignantly. "This is like your house—and we are just your two old servants the same as before. Never let that out of your mind!"

In spite of all I could do Peggy kept up this farce. She refused to take her meals with me. I had them alone in solitary state in the parlour, that is to say, as far as eating went, for she was always present.

Occasionally she would take a cup of tea, standing, but no more. Although she thus waited on me, she rated me and ruled me as authoritatively as ever, and cross-examined me minutely about Captain Halford and his letters, and his means.

She was by no means as enthusiastic about the match as she had been when in London, and listened to his epistles from the banks of the Nile, his descriptions of the fights at Abu-Klea and Metemneh with astonishing indifference.

"Yes, yes, he is a nice young gentleman and a grand fighter! I'm not denying it, but he has no money—and money is everything these times!"

"I have enough for two!"

"Yes; and you ought to make a grander match. I'm not saying he was not good to you, and helped you when you were in a terrible fix with that devil, your cousin Joe, and you have a right to be grateful; but a young girl, with your looks and your fortune, ought to get a great match, and marry a lord or someone that could give you a handle to your name, if he was only an honourable itself."

Of course, I assented the idea; but I presently became alive to what had put it into Peggy's head. The great man near Brayfield was Sir Ralph Torpichen.

Torpichen Park was a magnificent place, and ran down to the very edge of the village green. The house was an imposing structure, in the style of a white Italian palace. It stood in the centre of a wide, well-timbered domain, and was surrounded by the most lovely gardens, pleasure-grounds, and roseries, well-kept avenues running through the green sward like winding white ribbons, approached it on four sides.

Its picture gallery was famous, and one of the sights of the county. Its statues, and carvings, and rare china were the envy of collectors; and Torpichen Park had no mistresses.

Sir Ralph was a bachelor. According to Peggy's views, Torpichen and his master were destined by Providence for her nurling. To have her living in her own neighbourhood, the great lady of the place—a kind of queen in a small way, with a coronet on her carriage—seemed to be the proper termination to her career.

I could almost read Peggy's thoughts as she eagerly showed me the extent of Torpichen, walked me round the gardens, and marshalled me through the house.

Its master was in the south of France, and the stately housekeeper had much pleasure in displaying all the treasures under her care to "Mrs.

Clarke's young lady," the name by which I went in the village.

Peggy had not hid my light under a bushel as I was inclined to do myself. I had arrived at Brayfield to find myself famous, thanks to Peggy and Tony.

My wealth, my diamonds, my cruel guardian were familiar topics. Even my riding, my great learning, as Peggy was pleased to call it, and my guitar playing had all been blazoned forth.

Consequently I was respectfully received at Brayfield. People stared very hard when I first walked down the street under Peggy's proud escort.

At church, on Sunday, I was actually marshalled up, and shown into the Torpichen pew—a pew resembling a square room, with chairs and centre table for books, and a private stove. Over this, and, indeed, all round the church, I noticed tablets, monuments, and brasses to defunct Torpichens. Undoubtedly the Torpichens had been, and still were, great people in the land.

Of course, I, sitting alone in the great square pew, was the cynosure of every eye in the congregation, which was almost entirely composed of people of the farming class.

Next day I received a visit from the Rector, a handsome, white-haired old gentleman, who apologised for his wife not calling, as she was a confirmed invalid, and hoped I would waive ceremony, and go and see her.

In a gentlemanly fashion he drew me out, with an art that amused me. He had heard of my fortune, my diamonds, and my strange bringing-up, I could see, and was anxious to ascertain from my own lips if all he had heard was true.

Presumably, my answers were satisfactory, for he invited me to the Rectory, where I soon became a daily visitor. Mrs. Parish, his wife, being by far the nicest old lady I had ever met.

She had a pretty ivory-coloured face, and silver hair, a sweet voice, sympathetic manners, and had no children, and delighted in the company of young people—a delight she but rarely enjoyed. She had lost the use of her limbs, and lay on a sofa in a southern window all day long working and knitting for the poor or reading.

She was very well-informed. Her mind was a perfect store of anecdotes and reminiscences. She delighted in recalling past days of youth and energy, and past friends now dead and gone. I was an excellent listener. I was also her almoner, her messenger, her amanuensis. In three months' time I was like a daughter of the house. I confided in her ear all my joys, and sorrows, and hopes. I told her about Hugh. I even showed her his precious likeness. I went so far as to read her one of his letters; and, although she admired his picture and his production she pained me very much by saying in her sweetest tones,—

"I am glad you are not engaged to him; he showed his sense of honour in not binding you. You have seen no one but him, and a girl should have some choice before she takes a partner for life."

"I do not want any choice—and I consider myself engaged to him, in spite of all he says."

"And he does not. He writes my dear Miss Mauners, and yours sincerely, and there is nothing in his letters that might not be addressed to an old woman like me."

This was very true, and latterly Hugh's letters had been cooler and curter than his first effusions. What did it mean? Naturally I was not suspicious.

Peggy was not at all jealous of my frequent visits to her Rectory. On the contrary, she approved of them warmly, and also of the acquaintances I made there among some of the distant county families. I had spent four very happy months at Brayfield, enjoying long mornings with Mrs. Parish—long walks with her husband, and long evenings with Peggy, where we both sat with our work in hand in a way that recalled former evenings in an Eastern climate.

One morning, at the end of April, a telegram summoned Peggy and Tony to London saying,—

"Tom is dying. Come at once if you would see him alive."



PEOPLE STARED VERY HARD WHEN I WALKED DOWN THE STREET UNDER PEGGY'S PROUD ESCORT.

Tom was the grocer brother who lived in Lavender-place. Of course they were both in a dreadful state of mind. Peggy hastily collected a few things, and crammed them into a carpet bag. The fly was ordered from "The Red Cow." It was suggested that I should betake myself to the Rectory, but this I flatly declined to do; for though I knew I would be most welcome, yet I was shy, and had a delusion about going, and offering myself as a visitor without being previously invited. So it was arranged that I should have the company of Mrs. Hawkes, a decent woman from the village—decent and honest, but as deaf as a post, who did the washing and rough work of the cottage.

"If you are asked to dine at the Rectory, mind you stay," said Peggy, as she tied on her bonnet; "and maybe we will be back to-morrow, or maybe we will stay for the funeral. I don't half like leaving you alone—that I don't."

"Oh, I shall do very well, Peg. Don't hurry back on my account; and you had better be off now, or you will lose your train. You know you have a long drive."

"So I will," cried Peggy, making a snatch at her umbrella, giving her a hasty embrace, and running down the garden.

In another moment she and Tony had driven away, and Mrs. Hawkes and I were left alone. I don't know what came over me, but I had a curious feeling all the evening that I could not shake off—a feeling of depression that I could not account for. It had come on very wet, so my intention of strolling down to the Rectory was frustrated; and as I sat at the parlour windows in the dusk, listening to the moaning wind in the poplars, the rain lashing the parks, and saw grey, gusty-looking clouds shutting out the daylight, I had one of the worst fits of the blues I had ever experienced in the whole course of my nearly nineteen years' existence.

Vainly I tried to cheer myself with lights, a good fire and tea. I felt very much the same, especially after getting out and poring over Hugh's last letter.

It certainly contained the good news that the war was nearly over. The relief of Khartoum had been too late, and many lives had been vainly sacrificed.

The coming summer would, in all probability, see the army of the Nile at home.

This was capital news; but on the other hand this letter in my lap was eight weeks old, was very short and constrained, and he hinted that he was sorry that I had not "found myself comfortable and contented under my aunt's roof."

In her house, at least, you are surrounded so closely by fellow-inmates that you are safe from the intrusion of your uncle or his son. But in a lonely cottage, in the lonely country, with no other garrison than an old couple like Peggy and her husband, you are by no means so safe; and you know yourself, no one better, that Joe Manners does not know what scruples or honour mean. I would as soon trust a wild beast!

A lonely cottage! Yes, we were a good five minutes' walk to the nearest house, and Mrs. Hawkes and I might be murdered in our beds for all the outer world would know.

My thoughts were not *coulour de rose* as I thus sat and reflected.

We had not even a watch-dog; the only tame domestic animal on the premises was the cat.

At ten o'clock I went round the house, including the scullery and wash-house, tried every bar and bolt with my own fair hands, whilst Mrs. Hawkes held the candle.

Everything was secure, every key was turned, every bolt in its place; so with a shout of good-night to my companion (who slept in a closet off the kitchen) I went upstairs to bed, with a great contempt for my own fears.

Thinking and castle-building I lay awake for fully an hour watching the fire go lower and lower with every shifting of the expiring coals, listening to the wind outside, and to the sharp rattling of the rain upon the panes of the front window; and then I dozed off gradually and fell into a sound sleep.

I may have slept for a long time; I may have slept but for a few moments—I cannot tell.

All I know is that I was suddenly aroused to full consciousness, and found myself most thoroughly wide-awake and listening, every nerve in full tension, my heart beating and thumping violently against my side, my eyes strained into the surrounding darkness.

What, I asked myself, was the reason of my terror? For what was I listening so intently? I must have been dreaming!

No! not dreaming, for there! I distinctly heard it again.

My heart gave a bound as if it would choke me.

What I heard was the sound of a stealthy, stockinged foot stealing up the creaking stairs!

I was so dreadfully frightened that I was now prepared for anything; yes, even for what the gently opening door revealed.

(To be continued.)

THE most wonderful tree that grows is found in the Pacific Islands. From this tree the natives procure towels, cloth, tinder, and bread. It is about as tall as a three-storey house, and the branches, which come out straight from the tree like so many arms, are covered with leaves and fruit not unlike apples in appearance. This fruit is used as bread, and it is in season during eight months of the year, the natives finding a good living in it. As for glue, it comes from the trunk of the tree, and is found useful for many purposes; the leaves make excellent towels for the natives who care to use them; and from the inner bark of the tree a kind of coarse cloth can be made. Besides this, its dried blossoms are used for tinder in lighting fires, and the wood is in great demand for building purposes.



"GOOD GRACIOUS, ALEC, WHEN DID YOU GET THAT FROM!" LADY ROSALINE EXCLAIMED, AGITATEDLY.

UNA'S VOW.

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CHAPTER XVI.

MISSING!

WHEN Alec went to his mother's room he found her sitting up on the couch, her smelling-salts in one hand and a handkerchief in the other. She was pale and agitated, and kept looking round apprehensively, as if she feared something terrible might meet her gaze.

As a matter of fact, Lady Rosaline was one of those women who, having spent a life of luxury and self-indulgence, think destiny has no business to send any sort of interruption to the smoothness of their paths. Of course she was very sorry for the fate that had overtaken Lady Carstairs, and she could not forget that she herself had been chiefly instrumental in bringing the Countess to Oakenhurst; but it must be admitted that her principal sympathy was lavished on herself; not only because of the horror of the present situation, but also because she was keenly alive to what the future might bring.

"Where have you been? why did you not come to me before!" she asked petulantly, as her son bent over her and gravely kissed her brow.

"Because I have had no opportunity. Remember how much there has been to do. I have only just left the police inspector, and before that I had to see Doctor Whitmore."

"Ah, then he has arrived! I sent word that he was to be brought to me directly he came. How was it my orders were not obeyed?"

"It was my fault. I knew that one of the women could attend to you as well as a doctor, while it was necessary that he should examine the body with as little delay as possible."

Lady Rosaline shivered, and put her smelling-bottle to her finely-cut nostrils; then she said, in a lowered voice,—

"What does he say?"

"Only that the person who shot poor Hilda

must have been very close to her, and that death was instantaneous. Probably the poor girl had not even time to utter a cry. There can be no doubt that the shot I heard was the fatal one."

Lady Rosaline shivered again. For the first time she was brought face to face with tragedy in its most ghastly aspect. Nevertheless, her pretty, faded face expressed something more than horror; there was apprehension in it as well.

"Alec," she whispered, bending her head closer to his, so that there should be no danger of eaves dropping, "What has become of Eunice?"

He started violently and drew back. Strange as it may appear, he had completely forgotten that he was looking for his wife when he discovered the dead body of her rival.

"Eunice!" he repeated, in a startled voice.

"Has she not come back?"

Lady Rosaline shook her head.

"No. I crept to her rooms myself. One of them is locked; but though I called, and shook the handle of the door, I could not make anyone hear, and the key has been taken out."

Alec breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"No doubt Eunice has locked herself in. She sleeps very soundly, so she did not hear the noise you made; or perhaps she had neuralgia and took a sleeping draught. Yes, no doubt that is it. However, I'll soon see." And he went at once towards his wife's apartments.

Arrived at the bedroom, he called her name, as indeed he had done once before, only a few hours ago, but his efforts were unavailing.

As Lady Rosaline said, the key had been withdrawn from the lock, and this circumstance struck Alec as suspicious. If Eunice had locked herself in there seemed no reason for her taking the key.

The young man felt it was no time for deliberation, and after looking round to make sure there was no witness of what he was about to do he put forth his whole strength in an attempt to break open the door.

It yielded at once, and he stumbled across the threshold into the room.

It was empty!

Alec's very lips were white as he searched the apartment thoroughly from end to end.

It cannot be said that he expected to find his wife concealed there, and yet he hoped against hope that he might do so. His search was unsuccessful, so he proceeded into the dressing-room, which was the last of the three rooms. Here an unexpected development met him, for the pretty little apartment was littered from end to end with the contents of Eunice's wardrobe—as if someone had thrown cloaks and dresses hastily on the floor in an endeavour to make a selection from them.

Immediately the conviction forced itself on Alec that his wife had flown, and that her flight was intended to be final.

He had hardly come to this conclusion before a slight sound on the threshold made him look towards the door, where the inspector was standing in a half apologetic attitude, which did not, however, prevent him from taking in the position of affairs with his trained eyes.

"What is the matter, sir?" he asked, for Captain Beresford was leaning against the wall, wiping his damp brow with his handkerchief. "Has anything fresh happened?"

Alec did not answer quite immediately; it flashed through his mind that if Eunice had really gone the fact was bound to become public property, and therefore there would be no harm in telling Rowley the truth, which he did in a few words as possible.

The man listened quietly, then he proceeded to put a few questions on his own account:—when had Captain Beresford last seen his wife, and had she given him reason to suppose that she contemplated going away?

To this last interrogatory he was able to give a decided negative, as to the first—well, he had not seen her since dinner, for when he joined the ladies in the drawing-room she was not there.

Then followed a few more questions from Rowley.

Were Mrs. Beresford and the late Countess of

Carstairs very friendly, and was it likely they had joined each other in the grounds?

Alec took refuge in generalities; he could not say that the two ladies had been on terms of intimacy, and he thought it unlikely they had gone out together.

But, as a matter of fact, he was too bewildered to reason the matter out clearly.

Event seemed to have followed event so closely during the last twelve hours that he was powerless to distinguish between cause and effect.

He must be left alone to think it out quietly.

The inspector cast a keen glance at him as he said this.

Already he was beginning to put two and two together, and his opinions—based in a great measure on what he had heard in the servants' hall—were consolidating in one very important decision.

"In a case of this kind delay is always dangerous, and sometimes fatal," he observed, sententiously. "Had we not better try and find out where Mrs. Beresford has gone, and then bring her back?"

"You can't bring her back against her will," Alec said, with some of the bitterness of a deserted husband in his tone.

Rowley shrugged his shoulders.

He fancied he could bring her back—and pretty quickly, too, if he once succeeded in tracing her.

But he wanted to hear the husband's views before he took up the search on his own account.

There was a mystery here—a mystery in which Captain Beresford and his wife and Lady Carstairs herself had been concerned, and he could not quite determine what part each had played in it.

Alec, in the present instance, was clearly taken at a disadvantage, and under such circumstances people often make admissions that they would carefully keep back if they had time to put the requisite curb on their tongues.

Inspector Rowley did not intend that Captain Beresford should be left just yet to the quiet meditation that he said was necessary to him.

"I suppose," he continued, "you had no idea that Mrs. Beresford intended leaving you?"

The soldier flushed to the roots of his hair, and drew himself up angrily, fully prepared to resent this intrusion into his private affairs.

But a moment's reflection showed him the foolishness of making an enemy of Rowley—rather, indeed, should he try his best to keep on good terms with him. With an effort he schooled himself to answer calmly.

"No, such a notion never once entered my head: We are only just past our honeymoon."

"I know that, sir; but ladies are little-cattle, and sometimes take strange fancies into their heads—jealousy, for example."

Alec started as if he had been shot, at the significance of the tone.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, sharply, turning on the inspector.

"Well, I have heard, sir, that in old Colonel Beresford's time you were engaged to Lady Carstairs—or Miss Fortescue, as she was then, and it struck me that Mrs. Beresford may have had a grudge against the Countess on that account."

Alec was silent.

What indeed could he say in reply to a statement which was an obvious fact?

Oh! how foolish his mother had been to invite Hilda to Oakhurst.

That had been the beginning of all the trouble.

"Can you give me any hint as to where Mrs. Beresford would be likely to go?" went on Rowley, after a pause. "Has she friends in London?"

"Not that I know of," he replied; but even as he spoke it occurred to him how little he really knew of his wife's friends or history.

"To the best of my belief she has no relations of any kind, and as, before her marriage, she lived in France, it is not likely she knows anyone in England very intimately."

Rowley considered, the thoughtful frown

deepening on his brow, while he bit his nails furiously.

He felt himself in a responsible position, and he desired to do nothing too hastily, while, at the same time, it was very necessary to the success of his case that no time should be lost in following up the slightest clue, and that clue he thought he possessed.

At last he looked up, and addressed Alec, who also seemed to have fallen into a moody reverie.

"I take it, Captain Beresford, that you are anxious to bring to justice Lady Carstairs' murderer?"

"Certainly," the young man answered; but he looked away from the inspector as he spoke, and something in his face made the latter think better of what he had intended saying, with the result that an awkward pause ensued, which was broken by the entrance of another policeman—one of those Rowley had left in the plantation to continue the search he himself had begun.

It was clear from the man's demeanour that he had important intelligence to communicate.

"Well, Lake!" said Rowley, interrogatively.

The new comer touched his forelock as he answered—

"I've found the weapon, sir."

"What, the revolver?" exclaimed both his hearers in a breath.

Lake nodded, and produced from under his short cloak a small, silver-mounted revolver, curious both in its shape and engraving, which he laid gingerly down on the table—not quite sure, as it seemed, whether the weapon might not choose to go off of its own free will.

Rowley's eyes were on Alec as he pressed forward to examine the revolver, and he saw something in his expression that made him say quickly,—

"You have seen the weapon before, Captain Beresford?"

Alec hesitated before replying.

"I'm not sure. It seems in some way familiar to me, and yet I can't quite remember when and where I have seen it. Perhaps my recollection of it may come back presently."

"Where did you find it, Lake?" queried Rowley, bending down to examine it in his turn.

"It was hidden in a thick growth of brambles quite near to the spot where the body was lying," was the reply.

"You have not come across anything else suspicious?"

"No, sir. Directly I found this I brought it to the house."

"Quite right. Now go back and continue your search. I suppose Brown is still on guard?"

The man replied in the affirmative as he left the room, while Alec still continued to gaze at the little silver mounted toy with a puzzled frown on his brow. The longer he looked the more familiar it appeared. When and where had it come beneath his notice in the past?

Before he could find an answer to the question Lady Rosaline—terrified by her own thoughts and her son's absence—followed him to Eunice's apartments, and entering the dressing-room, came straight up to the little plush-covered table on which the revolver rested.

"Good gracious, Alec, where did you get that from?" she exclaimed, agitatedly.

Before Alec could speak Rowley stepped forward, saying eagerly,

"Does your ladyship recognise it?"

"Certainly I do. It belonged to my brother-in-law, Colonel Beresford, and I believe he brought it from Mexico with him when he was quite a boy. Originally there were a pair of them, but one got lost."

"During Colonel Beresford's lifetime?"

"Oh, yes—fifteen or twenty years ago I should think."

"You are sure this is the one that belonged to your brother-in-law?"

"Certain. If you look you will see a motto engraved upon it. 'All fair in love and war.'"

Rowley took it up, and there, sure enough, was the motto, proving beyond all manner of doubt the completeness of Lady Rosaline's identification.

"Does your ladyship happen to know where

Colonel Beresford kept this?" asked Rowley, smoothly, while Alec waited in breathless eagerness for her response. It came at once.

"Yes. He kept it in the carved oak bureau which used to be in his study, but which your wife"—turning to her son—"had brought into her private sitting-room directly after you returned from your honeymoon."

The moment the words were out of her mouth she regretted them, for the expression that came into the faces of her listeners told her she had made a mistake. She stopped short, faltering, and looking uncertainly from one to the other.

"What is the matter?" she asked at last, unable to bear the tension any longer.

"I was thinking," replied Rowley, with much deliberation, "that it was strange Mrs. Alec Beresford should have fled on the night of Lady Carstairs' murder, and stranger still that the weapon with which the crime was committed should have belonged to her!"

CHAPTER XVII.

ALEC HAS DOUBTS.

Alec turned fiercely on the police-officer as he made this speech, while Lady Rosaline shrank back, her face growing white. It was not difficult to guess the insinuation underlying those words of Rowley, and it awoke within him a savage resentment which surprised himself.

"What do you mean?" he said, haughtily.

"I have promised to give you every assistance in my power in the unravelling of this mystery, but I have not given you permission to make statements reflecting on the honour of my name."

Rowley bit his lip, feeling that he had been led into an indiscretion, and regretting his hasty tongue. He would have done better to keep his suspicions to himself, and converted them into certainties before mentioning them. Very soon afterwards he quitted the room, leaving Lady Rosaline and her son together.

"Alec!" said the former, in a trembling whisper, laying one hand on the young man's sleeve. "Have you really no idea what has become of Eunice?"

"None," he returned, gloomily; "but I must lose no time in endeavouring to trace her."

"I am not sure about that. Perhaps," Lady Rosaline hesitated before completing the sentence, "perhaps under present circumstances it will be better to make no effort to find her."

"What!" he exclaimed, shaking himself free from her grasp, and facing her. "Do you also harbour the same suspicions as Rowley?"

"I cannot help it, Alec," she sobbed, "the evidence is so dreadfully against her. She and poor Hilda were in the grounds at the same time; they hated each other, and then Eunice's flight, and the fact that the revolver with which the murder was committed belonged to her—everything points to the one conclusion."

Yes, this was true, and Alec could not gainsay it. Perhaps after all his mother's suggestion was a wise one, and it would be better, for a time at any rate, that Eunice should keep out of the way. In the meanwhile he would search the oak bureau in her sitting-room, and see if he could not find the revolver, which he now remembered his uncle used to keep there.

He carried this idea into effect, watched anxiously by Lady Rosaline who, however, had no doubt as to the result. The bureau was locked, but by a strange chance one of Alec's own keys fitted it thoroughly. It contained no revolver.

He stood for a few minutes leaning up against the side of the bureau, trying to recall the events of the evening.

At dinner he remembered noticing that his wife was unusually quiet; but likely enough that was because Lady Carstairs had been unusually talkative, and most of her remarks were addressed to himself or Lady Rosaline.

The real mistress of the house had been left out in the cold, and somehow the injustice of this struck Alec as it had never struck him

before. Since dinner he had not set eyes on his wife.

"What time did Eunice leave the drawing-room?" he asked his mother.

"Not so very long before you came in. She took a book with her into the conservatory."

The young man started violently. The conservatory! Then it was possible she had overheard his conversation with Hilda Carstairs—a conversation which she would naturally regard as an insult to her wifehood.

"She came back into the house through the front door," went on Lady Rosaline. "Hilda's maid, Melanie Coote, saw her, and told me that her face was white and wild, and although she passed the girl quite close she did not appear to see her. It was then, no doubt, that she came up and got the revolver. I have known all along that she was of a very jealous temperament, and no doubt the sight of you and Hilda together fanned the flame of her jealousy until she lost all control over herself."

Lady Rosaline made this statement in a quietly matter-of-fact way; but her speech had an effect on Alec which she had not been able to foresee.

He acknowledged her reasoning to be sound, and the conclusion it led her to seemed feasible enough, but while she was speaking he pictured the young wife, friendless, alone, goaded to desperation by the sight of her beautiful and triumphant rival, and driven by it to the commission of a crime that in her saner moments her whole soul would have revolted against.

For it had come to this—Alec also believed in his wife's guilt, and his own endeavour must now be to save her from the consequences of her crime.

Frightened by the sternness of his expression, Lady Rosaline once more approached him, and laid a timid hand on his sleeve. He shook it off with such anger as he had never in his life exhibited to his mother.

"If Eunice has indeed done this deed the stain of blood does not rest on her alone!" he exclaimed, his eyes flashing. "She has been shamefully treated, and I have not been the only sinner against her. From the moment I brought her home, young and alone, her life has been made more or less a burden to her, and I have stood by tamely watching the indignities to which you subjected her. Yes, mother, I see the truth at last, and I will speak it. You have been cruel to my wife, and my affection for you made me for a time blind to your faults. I should have protected the poor child from you, instead of which, for the sake of keeping peace, I said nothing. If I could only live these few months over again how differently would I act! It was you who invited Hilda Carstairs here, and you did your utmost to throw us together, with the result of this murder. Be assured, when the final judgment is delivered you will not escape the share you have taken in bringing about this tragedy."

They were hard words, perhaps; but Lady Rosaline deserved them, and at the bottom of her soul she felt the accusations he brought against her were true ones. Breaking into a storm of hysterical sobs she threw herself on the ground at his feet, and held up her clasped hands.

"Alec, Alec, unsay those dreadful words! Have you forgotten it is to your mother you are speaking—your mother, who would have done anything in the world to serve your happiness!"

"But who has wrecked it instead!" he retorted bitterly, as he left her, and went to his own room, where he locked himself in, determined to have an hour's quiet reflection, in which to decide on his future plan of action.

He went to the window and threw it wide open. By this time it was broad daylight, the sun had risen, and the long shadows of the trees lay slantwise across the grass, while the air was full of the songs of birds, and the blown scents of spring flowers.

How bright all nature looked under the blue sky! What a contrast to the sombre gloom of his own soul!

As Alec stood there it was not so much of the fair dead Countess he was thinking as of poor Eunice, wandering in bitter misery, homeless, friendless, with the brand of Cain on her brow.

He took out the scrap of jewelled embroidery

he had picked up in the plantation and looked at it—damning proof as he deemed it of his wife's guilt, for it showed beyond dispute that she had been near the scene of the murder that evening, and, taken with the other circumstances, it left no doubt in his mind that hers had been the hand which fired the fatal shot.

Well, it was a good thing that he had chanced to see it, and much better than if that prying policeman had picked it up, for now no one, save himself, would be the wiser, and as this thought flashed across the young man's mind he got a pair of scissors and began cutting up the embroidery into tiny fragments, which he scattered on the bed of spring flowers underneath the window.

Then he paced backwards and forwards, his mind busy with many problems.

From what Rowley had he thought it extremely likely that he would at once obtain a warrant for Eunice's arrest; still as she had a good start of him it was not by any means certain that he would catch her up.

Alec had a very high opinion of his wife's cleverness; her brain was wonderfully clear, and her courage equally great, so that it seemed to him probable enough that she would succeed in giving her enemies the slip, and this being the case, he decided that it would be better for him to remain quiescent and make no attempt to trace her for the present at least.

His idea with regard to Rowley's next move was a correct one, for the inspector, now assured that Mrs. Alec Beresford was Lady Carstairs' murderer, lost no time in applying to the nearest magistrate for a warrant for her arrest.

He did not, however, make this fact public, thinking that it would be just as well to keep it secret, while he gathered more evidence against her.

He wished to have a very strong case to lay before the coroner at the inquest, and he jubilantly pictured the praise that would be bestowed on him for his prompt action.

Meanwhile he despatched emissaries all over the country to make inquiries for the suspected woman, but strangely enough, he could obtain no news as to her whereabouts. No one seemed to have seen her, and she had been unnoticed at the railway stations.

Rowley tried to get some sort of information regarding the attire she had worn; but in this he was unsuccessful, for it appeared that she had left the house without attracting any attention whatever.

And so the day passed, and when evening came affairs seemed to be in exactly the same position as they had been at sunrise, except that it had leaked out that young Mrs. Beresford was believed to have committed the murder.

This view of the subject met with general credence in the household; but, strangely enough, it was universally hoped that the guilty woman would escape justice.

As a matter of fact, Eunice had already made herself extremely popular with the domestics, who, on the other hand, voted Lady Carstairs proud and overbearing. Moreover, they had formed a pretty shrewd idea as to the position of affairs before the death of the Countess, and had been indignant with her for "taking the bride's husband away from her!"

Mrs. Redwood was almost the only member of the household who refused to believe in her mistress's guilt. She vehemently declared that young Mrs. Beresford was an innocent of the crime as an unborn babe, and so excited did she become over her championship that she ended by bursting into tears, and retiring hastily to her room.

Melanie Coote happened to be present when this outburst took place, and at the housekeeper's departure she shrugged her shoulders significantly.

"Mrs. Redwood has good reasons for what she says, no doubt," the lady's maid observed; "but she is as secret in that as she is in other things. She's a deep one, she is! If she were to tell us the true history of her life I expect she would surprise some of us above a bit." Which piece of sapient wisdom was entirely agreed in by her listeners, who, however, were also of opinion

that Melanie Coote herself was not so entirely candid and outspoken as she might have been.

Rowley stayed in or about the house all day, having posted his subordinates at various places in the grounds, and arranged that directly any of them saw anything suspicious he was to come and tell it.

To do him justice the inspector was a first-rate organiser, and would have beaten many a diplomatist in the careful way in which he laid his plans. Just as it was getting dusk, and he was standing outside the conservatory, his keen eyes on the alert for any one who approached or left the house, he saw one of the men he had stationed in the plantation coming towards him.

"Any news?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Not much, sir, only that housekeeper, Mrs. Redwood, has been prowling about the plantation, just near the spot where the corpse was found, and it struck me she was on the look out for something."

"Mrs. Redwood, the housekeeper," repeated Rowley, nodding his head. "Did you tell her I had given orders that no one was to come within twelve yards of the place?"

"Yes, and when she saw that I was after her she hooked it, and I have not seen her since. But I thought you'd like to know."

"Right you are," said the inspector, approvingly. "I'll keep my eyes on her. You go back to your post again."

The man was on the point of obeying, when a sudden idea seemed to strike him, and he turned back.

"I suppose you know a telegram was sent to the house to-day for Melanie Coote?" he queried.

"No, I didn't. There have been lots of telegrams coming and going for Captain Beresford and Lady Rosaline; but I wasn't aware anyone else had received one. How do you know it was for Melanie Coote?"

"Because the boy as brought it came peepin' and pryin' into the plantation, hopin' to see where the murder took place—you know what bloodthirsty young raskils boys are, sir. So I was just-a-goin' to send him about his business with a flea in his ear, when I thought I'd ask him first who the message he brought was for, and he told me Miss Melanie Coote."

This intelligence set the inspector cogitating. These two women—Melanie Coote and Mrs. Redwood—certainly knew more than they were inclined to tell, but he did not think they were in each other's confidence—on the contrary, from what he had gathered, there seemed to be a coolness between them, if not actual dislike.

Of course, it was quite on the cards that the telegram received by Melanie had no connection whatever with her mistress's murder, and yet Rowley was keenly anxious to see it, and assure himself on the point.

"There's one thing, neither she nor anybody else can leave the house without being spotted," he said to himself, with a chuckle of satisfaction at the thought of how well he had placed his spies at the back, while he himself guarded the front of Oakenhurst.

He kept his vigil undisturbed till darkness had fallen on the landscape, and the stars came slowly out in the purple dusk of the heavens.

Behind him the house loomed large and gloomy, for few lights illumined it—perhaps in deference to that grim presence which kept guard in the library, where Lady Carstairs' dead body had been placed.

It was about ten o'clock when a man issued from the front door, wrapped in a fur-lined coat, and with a felt hat drawn low over his brow.

Round his neck was a white alken muffler, so that nothing of his face was visible, and Rowley might have been at a loss to discover his identity, if he had not recognised the coat as belonging to Captain Beresford.

Evidently the young officer wished to avoid notice, for he crossed the terrace hastily, giving a military salute in response to the inspector's.

Rowley watched him with a puzzled knitting of the brows.

There was something about him that challenged curiosity, and after a moment's thought

Rowley made up his mind that it would be his duty to follow him.

Accordingly, he waited until Alec had got into the shrubbery, and then, at a respectful distance, and always keeping in the shadow, he prepared to dog his footsteps.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT WAS THROWN IN THE POOL.

HAPPILY for the inspector's purpose, the person he was following seemed so intent on his business that he only looked round once or twice, and then Rowley cleverly managed to slip into the darkness of the shrubs.

When, however, Captain Beresford left the shrubbery his pursuer had a momentary qualm lest he should strike into the open parklands, in which case it would have been very difficult to keep him in sight without being observed.

However, he did not do this, being in reality quite as anxious to cling to the shadow as Rowley himself could have wished; so, instead of keeping to the main track, he branched off into a little spinny on the left, which, after a mile of broken ground, led into a wood, where the darkness of the overarching boughs was so great that once or twice Rowley feared he had lost his quarry altogether.

Once in the wood Alec walked more quickly, and with the assurance of one who knows every yard of the ground he is traversing, although the narrow path was tortuous enough in all conscience, and anyone might readily have lost his way.

The inspector followed at a very respectful distance, until a sudden bend hid the figure in front from view, and then Rowley hurried his footsteps, and at the bend almost betrayed his presence, for the path opened into a clearing, in the midst of which was set a pond, and Captain Beresford had come to a pause here, as if he had reached his destination.

"What's he up to, I wonder," muttered Rowley to himself. "He can't intend committing suicide!"

If this were, indeed, his intention, he had chosen a place where he was not likely to be interrupted, for the loneliness of the spot was almost appalling. Heavy-folaged trees surrounded the pond in a complete circle, and perhaps it was their shadows that made the surface look so black. Not altogether, though, for even in winter, when there were no leaves on the trees, those sullen, waveless waters kept the inkiness of their surface undisturbed, as if a spell of horror lay over them which could not be lifted.

Local tradition said the place was haunted. A murder had been committed there years ago, and the spirit of the victim rose from the waters on certain anniversaries, and cried for vengeance. This legend had had the effect of keeping people away from the vicinity of the pond; indeed, the villagers would make a detour of a mile or two rather than pass it. Moreover, it was a dangerous place, for it was said to be very deep—so deep that no plummet had ever sounded it. But this latter idea was no doubt erroneous.

Rowley, from his place behind a great girthed oak, was well screened from observation, while he commanded a full view of the pond. He saw Alec look round and then walk to the further side of it, which was said to be the deepest. Here he paused once more, and drew from under his coat a parcel which seemed to be wrapped in paper, and which he threw into the waters, watching while they closed round it and widening circles told where it had gone down. Then he turned and began hastily retracing his steps.

"That was not a man's throw, it was a woman's," Rowley exclaimed half-aloud, in his eagerness. "No man in the world ever chucked anything away like that. Someone has been masquerading in Captain Beresford's coat. Now I wonder who the deuce it is!"

He was getting excited, something assured him that he was on the eve of an important discovery. He tracked the figure back towards Oakenhurst as carefully as before; but now he contrived to keep closer, for the woman—and the gait and general

demeanour of the person convinced him that his idea of her sex was correct—seemed to have lost all fear of being followed, and walked more quickly, without once turning round to see whether there was anyone behind.

In the shrubbery, however, she displayed more hesitation; and just before she reached the wicket-gate she stood for a moment as if to decide some question that had presented itself.

It was an opportunity for Rowley, and he availed himself of it. Screened by the shrubs, he approached her closely before she was aware of it, and seized hold of her by the collar of the coat.

Now that he was near enough he could see that she was much shorter than Captain Beresford, and, of course, very much slighter. The coat, however, being a heavy one, stuck out well, and the fur collar and lapels hid the fact that it was miles too big for its wearer.

"I should very much like to know what you mean by assuming a character not your own!" exclaimed Rowley, while a faint scream from his captive made his former assurance doubly sure. "I've got you now, and I don't intend to let you go!"

The words were a little premature, for, with a dexterous twist, she contrived to wriggle out of the coat and dashed into the shrubs, leaving it in his hands.

The inspector was so taken aback at the suddenness of this move that he did not follow quite so quickly as he might have done, with the result that the woman contrived to make her escape.

"Never mind," he muttered, returning to pick up the coat, which he had dropped on the gravel, "she's bound to get in the house some way, and I guess it won't be through the front-door for fear of attracting attention, and all the other entrances are watched. I'll be even with you yet, my lady!"

He accordingly went in the house and deposited the coat in its accustomed place, and then proceeded to the rear of the mansion and sought out his satellites.

Yes, one of them said in answer to his questions, two women had entered the house together, not more than a few minutes ago. They were Mrs. Redwood, the housekeeper, and Melanie Coote, both in earnest conversation.

"And both dressed in outdoor attire?" asked the inspector. Another affirmative reply. The man had not noticed their dress very particularly, except that they were both in black, for they slipped past him quickly, although he was of opinion that neither had observed him.

Rowley retired rather discomfited. He knew it would be useless to question the women themselves, since their conduct led him to believe there was some sort of collusion between them; moreover, to do so would be to let them know their movements were watched, and this was exactly what he wanted to avoid.

However, he did not yet despair. The smartest and sharpest of his men—Brown by name—had been also deputed to keep a keen lookout on the entrances and exits of Oakenhurst, and it was not unlikely he might help to solve the tangled skein even yet.

Rowley went in search of this man, but could not find him. For some reason or other he had left his post.

"He'll be back presently," the inspector said to himself, preparing to possess his soul in patience, "and then I shall have some news. He's as sharp as a needle with two points, Brown is."

Half-an-hour later Brown came back, and fully justified his superior's opinion of his sagacity. While, in a low voice, he told his tale, he and Rowley stood in the middle of the terrace, for as they both knew walls have ears, and if you would tell a secret without a chance of eavesdroppers then you must select an open space where none have a chance of lurking.

"I knew Melanie Coote had had a telegram," said the man, "and when I saw her peeping out of the landing window just about sunset, it struck me she wanted to make sure there was no one about before she ventured out."

"Of course she did not catch a glimpse of me, for I kept well in the group of laurels, and a few

minutes later she came out, dressed in black, and with a thick veil over her face.

"She slipped round the back way, so I knew she was going into the high road, and this gave me time to put on the smock frock I had ready, and the wig and shepherd's hat—it's such a good disguise that I knew I might venture close to her without her suspecting who I was. So I followed her quite boldly; but at the turn in the roads she nearly gave me the slip, for there was a cab waiting, and she jumped into it, and it drove off towards W—. I was in a fix, and hardly know what I should have done, but just then, as luck would have it, I saw a butcher's cart in the distance, which I knew belonged to W—, so I gave the boy that drove a shilling to give me a lift. His nag was such a good one that it passed the cab-horse, so just as we got into the city I jumped out and waited."

"It was not long before the cab came up, and then I had no difficulty in keeping level with it, for of course it went slower through the crowded streets, and it had not gone far before Melanie Coote got out, and walked down one of the side streets."

"She did not pay the driver, and I gathered from that that the cab had been engaged by some one else, and paid for as well."

"Well, my lady walks on till she comes to the 'Bear and Ragged Staff,' and then she goes in, and after a decent interval I follow. Now it so happens that I know one of the maids at the 'Bear,' and through her I found out what I wanted."

"The lady in black had asked for a gentleman named Jones, who had engaged a private sitting-room on the first floor, and she had been taken up to him."

"I asked Lucy—that's my friend's name—if there was any chance of overhearing what they said, and at first she said no; but the sight of half a sovereign—his a wonderful talisman, sir, gold is!—she wavered, and then it came out that the sitting-room was an old-fashioned one, with a square window close to the top of one of the walls between that room and the adjoining one, and that this window could be slipped down in a groove—there are a good many of the kind about in old public-houses."

"The next room was kept as a still-room, and, to cut the story short, I got into it, and soon found myself on the top of a pair of steps, peeping through the little square aperture in the wall."

"Luckily for my purpose it had a red curtain hanging in front of it, and I cut a tiny hole in the stuff with my penknife so that I not only heard but saw everything that transpired."

"Well done, well done! I couldn't have managed better myself," observed Rowley, approvingly. "What sort of man was this Jones?"

"A big, burly fellow, with strongly marked features, that looked as if they had been exposed to the weather a good deal."

"He was well dressed, and wore a heavy gold chain, and a diamond ring."

"It struck me that he had been drinking. I don't mean to say that he was intoxicated, or anywhere near it; still the look in his eyes gave me the idea."

"He was sitting down at the table, with a siphon of soda-water, and a decanter of brandy at his elbow, and Melanie stood on the other side of the table, her veil thrown up, and her eyes snapping and glittering."

"A hundred pounds isn't enough," she says, 'make it five, and then I'll think about it.'

"Think about it, will you!" he exclaimed, with a sort of laugh. 'Damn your impudence. You ought to think yourself precious lucky to have such an offer as mine made you. My opinion is that it's a generous one.'

"Not when you consider what it means to you, sir," she returned, significantly.

"He started up and looked at her, then sat down again, and poured himself out some more brandy."

"His hand was steady enough I noticed—indeed, he looked to me like a man of iron nerve, and in this respect he was ahead of Melanie, for though she spoke quietly and firmly, I could see by her face that she was dreadfully excited."

"It means that I should look like a fool, that's all," he said, at last, indifferently.

"Now, it's a pose I'm not fond of, and rather than let the world into the secret I'm willing to pay you a hundred pounds. That's the case in a nutshell."

"Oh, no, it isn't, sir!" she interrupted. "It's a good deal more than that you are paying for, and you know it as well as I do."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, perhaps I had better not put what I mean into words—it's safer not, but I think that last letter of yours is worth the money I ask—that one alone."

He seemed a bit staggered at that, and looked at her with a frown.

"I suppose it's superfluous to ask whether you have read it?" he said, after a pause, and she smiled as she replied,—

"Oh, yes, I've read it—I've read them all if it comes to that. It's one of a lady's maid's perquisites, you know."

"I picked up my ears at that, as you may imagine," interpolated Brown, "for it was an assurance that my suspicions were correct, and that this interview had something to do with Lady Carstairs."

Rowley nodded his head.

"Go on," he said, "I'm anxious to hear the rest."

"Well," continued Brown, "the gentleman frowned harder than ever at her reply, and it was a few seconds before he spoke again; then he brought down his fist on the table with a thump."

"Look here," he said, with a kind of threat in his voice, "I'm not the sort of person to be held under the thumb of a bit of a lady's maid, and it's just as well that you should understand that at the outset. Blackmailing has a very ugly sound, and it's punished pretty severely, you know. It won't do for you to get trying that game on me."

"I'm not trying it on you," she says, and though her face had gone pale, she didn't flinch. "I'm selling you a bundle of letters, that's all."

"Letters which don't belong to you," he puts in, with an ugly laugh, which seemed to provoke her, for she answered him back sharply enough.

"They don't belong to you either, for that matter. I had some trouble to get them, and risk as well. It's quite right I should be paid for both."

"I've offered you a hundred pounds."

"And that isn't enough—what's more, I'm not going to take it. Five hundred pounds is nothing to you—nothing."

"That's neither here nor there. I'm a business man, and I have made it a rule never to pay more for a thing than it is worth."

"Ah, but then, perhaps, you've never been in quite such a tight hole as this before!" she returned, quickly. Then she looked at the clock which was ticking on the mantel-piece. "I must not stay here much longer, or my absence will be noticed. Oakenhurst just brushes with detectives, and it was as much as I could manage to slip out without being seen."

At this point Brown interrupted his narrative to indulge in a laugh, in which Rowley joined, at Miss Melanie Cootes's very natural mistake with regard to her own cleverness in outwitting them both.

(To be continued.)

THE Lachine Rapids of the St. Lawrence are at last to be utilized. For some time work has been prosecuted on a large wing dam that runs out more than 1,000 into the St. Lawrence River. A fall of water is secured by this means of 15,000 horse-power. This water power is to be transformed into electricity. Upon the dam a power house will be built to run its entire length, and show an unbroken interior of 1,000 feet in length.

HEIGHT INCREASED

Three inches without detection by Pinet's Elevators. Awarded Gold Medal, Paris.—R. PINET, Boot and Shoe Bureau, 55, Berners Street, London. Pamphlet one stamp.

WHICH IS THE HEIRESS?

—10—

CHAPTER XLII.—(continued.)

MARY SEYMOUR soon found that she had made a mistake. The poor girl was worse than ever. She had even forgotten her.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" she asked, wonderingly.

"Don't you know me, poor little thing?" she asked, in an awe-struck voice.

"No," said Hester, raising her troubled eyes to the face before her.

"But you surely must remember Ann Reardon!" she said.

The girl shook her head.

"Do you remember who and what you are?" asked the woman, in a low, intense voice.

She shook her head.

"No," she replied, slowly.

"We are going away from here, you and I. I am going to take you down to the city. You are my daughter, and your name is Victoria Reardon. Do you understand that?"

The large blue eyes looked at her intently.

"Are you quite sure you comprehend what I say?" she asked.

"I—I am your daughter," said Hester repeating the words after her—"and I have been very sick. That is all I know."

"Exactly. Wherever we go that is what you are to say."

It was a dangerous experiment, attempting to leave the lonely house, and go by railway back through the very places where such a heavy reward was offered for her capture. There was but one way in which she could accomplish it, and that was to disguise herself and the girl as well, beyond recognition.

The next night, while Hester slept, she put the plan she had laid out into execution. Boiling the hulls of walnuts, which grew in great profusion about the place with the brownish juice extracted from them she coloured the girl's face, her hands, and her arms so effectually that even her best friend would not have recognised her. Her own face she coloured in like manner.

"We would pass readily enough for Italians now," muttered Mary Seymour, surveying herself critically in the bit of cracked mirror. I doubt if Beatrice herself would recognise us—or even the lover of the girl."

She had money in her pocket—enough to last for some weeks. The only thing which she feared was detection. Beatrice's visits were always a week apart. She knew that she could have plenty of opportunity to go and return before she came again. She would not know of Hester's absence. It was with the greatest reluctance that Beatrice ever came to the house.

When Mary Seymour asked Hester to put on her hat and shawl the girl complied without a murmur. It was night. The trees made long, dark shadows under the moon's rays. She took Hester by the hand as though she were a little child.

"Do you know where we are going?" she asked.

"No," responded the girl.

"Would you like to know?"

"Yes," said Hester, absently.

"We are going to the great city, where you shall earn ever so much money playing the piano. You shall be a music-teacher if you can remember how to play the piano as you once did."

The girl's face brightened, and her eyes grew large and luminous. Music was the only memory that lingered in the girl's mind when every other had faded.

"Shall you like that?" asked the woman, eying the girl curiously.

"Yes," she added, dreamily.

"You have such a beautiful voice, too, you would do well to go on the stage. Would you really care for it?"

"I do not know," said Hester, vaguely.

"We are almost at the station," said Mary Seymour. "Remember to keep your veil down well. Call me mother if anybody passes and

stops to look at us. Do you think you can remember that?"

"I will try," said the girl, in a bewildered way.

CHAPTER XLIII.

It was midnight when Mary Seymour and Hester entered the station. It wanted scarcely a minute to train-time, and the woman knew that the station-master, who was a ticket-collector as well, would have barely time to give her her ticket, let alone take a mental survey of her companion and herself.

The man did, however, give a start of curiosity as he beheld her. Either a gipsy or an Italian, by the look of her face, was the thought that passed through his mind, but her voice was that of an English woman.

"I thought I knew every one in and about the village, but I declare I never saw them before."

They were evidently mother and daughter. She had remarked something about her daughter; but what it was he could not quite catch. He saw them get into the train. A moment more and they were whirling off toward the metropolis. It was quite two hours later ere the station-master's duties were ended, and he returned to his home.

His wife, who always had a nice little meal ready for him, no matter what hour he returned, was waiting for him.

"Has anything happened to-day, John?" she asked. "You look so thoughtful."

"What could happen! Nothing ever happens in this Heaven-forsaken little place," he answered.

"Why, yes, there does," she replied. "Wasn't that lovely young girl abducted from this village for whose whereabouts such a large reward was offered?"

The ticket-collector jumped to his feet with a wild cry.

"Great Heaven! how could I have been so blind!"

"What's the matter, John?" she asked, wondering if it was the soup which didn't please him—John was always so particular about his soup.

"I have lost the chance of a life-time, Polly," he said. "Great Heaven! was ever a man so stupid before! I've lost the chance of a fortune!"

"I hope you haven't been drinking anything down in the village," said his wife, in terror.

"Don't torture me, woman!" he cried. "I've lost enough to keep me in drinking-money all the rest of my natural life!"

"Will you tell me what you mean, John?" exclaimed his wife, looking at him curiously.

He sat down in his arm chair, trembling like a leaf.

"You have always said I was a fool, Polly, and I have scouted the idea; but now I shall hereafter believe that I am the greatest fool the world holds."

"That is not true, John," declared his wife, woman-like. "You're the cleverest man in the wide world!"

"You won't say that when you hear what I've done, or, rather what I haven't done."

"I will listen; but I shall not allow you or anybody else to run yourself down! Come, now, do tell me all about it. It must be something terrible that has upset you like this. Have you forgotten to load some perishable goods? Have the chickens all died in the incubator? Has a weasel or anything of that kind run in among the young ducks?"

"Hush!" he repeated; "don't annoy me; it's worse than all that! Now, sit still; that is, if a woman can sit still, and I'll tell you just what I think has happened."

She sat down quietly enough, for she saw that he was terribly excited.

"I have had what was a nice little fortune within my grasp, Polly," he cried. "With one stroke I could have made enough to pay off the mortgage on this little home of ours. They say that fortune knocks once at every man's door, and that if he doesn't grasp it quickly the chance flies past him. Men have made fortunes on a single turn of a die! Some men have been fools

enough to lose them when they are within their grasp."

"That is all very true, John," she replied; "but you forget you have not told me what has happened."

He looked at her hopelessly for a moment.

"You know that there has been one thousand pounds reward offered to the person who could give information that would lead to the capture of the woman who so dastardly attempted to murder the girl up at The Willows—the woman who afterwards made her escape so cleverly from the authorities. She succeeded afterwards in bodily abducting the girl, you well remember. Well, I believe that I was face to face with that woman to-night—ay, and the girl, too, whom they are mourning as dead!"

His wife now jumped to her feet, greatly excited.

"Oh, John, what makes you think so!" she panted. "Surely, it couldn't have been!"

But when he had related the incident that had just happened a great cry broke from her lips.

"I think you are certainly right, John. It must have been that woman and the girl. They have gone on to London, you say. You go right over to The Willows, inform the folks, then go and arouse the authorities, and set them on the track as quickly as possible. Not a moment is to be lost."

"Hold on! hold on! That is different entirely from the calculations that I have made. Inform the authorities! Let them hunt them up and secure the thousand! Why, woman, you must be mad!" he cried, springing to his feet and pacing up and down. "I have been sitting here thinking of an entirely different plan. A man must never act upon the first impulse. It's wrong, Polly—all wrong. A man should think twice before he acts."

"You thought twice, and that is what put you out of the thousand," she added, grimly.

"Now, don't you be always throwing that up in my face!" he cried; "making me wish that I hadn't told you. Don't, whatever you do, run round the neighbourhood by daylight, bearing the news to all the neighbours."

"John," she said, reproachfully, "this is the first time you have ever accused me of being a newbore."

"If you speak one word of this affair, it will be all over the village in an hour's time."

"Have no fear, John," she responded. "Tell me your plan."

"Well, I will get two weeks' leave of absence. You know this is just at my vacation time, and I will go down to the city and do a little detective work myself. I will find those two who took the train to-night, if I have to tramp up and down every street in the city to do it. When I have found them I will soon learn their identity. If it should prove that I am quite correct in my surmise it means quite a little fortune to Polly and I and the baby."

The officials at the chief office were rather surprised when John Mason presented himself the next morning, asking for a two-weeks' vacation. It was surprising from the fact that John Mason had always scoffed at the idea of a vacation, and still more astonished were they when they learned that he intended spending it in the metropolis.

Polly watched and waited at home in a fever of excitement.

"If John was only like other men, and would write me from day to day just how he was progressing, I should be so glad!" she thought; "but of course I won't know a thing about it till I read it in the newspapers. He is generally very lucky in anything he undertakes. If they are in the city he will find them," she mused.

She fell to day-dreaming over the amount of good that could be accomplished with a thousand pounds. She had stoutly maintained all along to her husband that she did not believe the young girl was dead. Now to see her belief almost verified fairly took her breath away.

The station was placed in charge of a young man during John Mason's absence. He was very thorough in the discharge of his duty; but Mrs. Mason couldn't rest until she had gone down to the station every evening to see that all duties

were discharged properly, knowing full well that if any mistake was to occur it would worry John so much. One evening, as she stepped into the waiting-room, to her great surprise she saw Wyndham Powis enter by an opposite door. Woman-like, her first impulse was to rush to him with the wonderful news that his beautiful sweetheart, whom he mourned as dead, was living.

She was half-way across the room ere she remembered her husband's warning to say nothing about the affair. She stopped short. The young man saw her emotion, and realising that she wished to speak to him, stepped over to her side, and raised his hat with his usual courtesy.

"You—you—are Lord Powis!" she stammered, confusedly.

"I am that most unhappy of men," he answered.

"I—I have heard of your great bereavement, sir," she said, "and I want to tell you how sorry I am for you."

"You are indeed very kind to offer me your sympathy," he said. "Please believe that I am not insensible to it."

"Are—are you going away, sir!" she asked, with a quiver in her voice.

"Yes," he answered, wearily; "I am going away to try to forget it all."

"Are you going far, sir!" she asked.

"I do not know," he responded; "I may go to the other end of the world, and never return."

Her heart beat violently.

He would not go away if he had even the slightest inkling of the truth. Should she tell him then and there, and brave John's anger?

"I wish I knew what to do," was the thought that rushed through her brain. "Which is right, and which is wrong? He must not go away—that is certain."

CHAPTER XLIII

DURING the moment the wife of the station master hesitated she was lost. The train thundered into the station, the young man sprang into it, and the next instant he was lost to sight.

"Oh, dear me—dear me," she cried, wringing her hands. "The very thing happened to me that I was reproaching my husband for. I was not quick enough with my tongue."

Meanwhile, Mary Seymour and Hester had already reached the metropolis. Over and over again the woman had warned the girl to reply to no questions that might be asked her, and to say that she, Mary, was her mother.

"Do you understand!" she asked.

"Yes," answered the girl, mechanically.

They went at once to a boarding-house, and the woman who kept it marvelled much at the daintiness of the dark-skinned girl and the coarseness of the woman who called the girl her daughter.

Mary Seymour was not unknown in London.

A year before she had been thrown in contact with the manager of an opera house in rather a peculiar way.

She had been to the seaside, and while walking upon the sands she had observed a man heading his boat to the shore. A high wave caught it the next moment, and in an instant of time the frail craft was overturned and the man precipitated into the water. He could not swim; the woman saw that at a glance. There was not another human being about to go to his rescue, and she was an expert swimmer.

In an instant she was breasting the mad waves, swimming rapidly toward the spot where the man had disappeared for the second time. He rose almost within her grasp. She succeeded in catching him, and brought him to land in safety. The man's gratitude knew no bounds. He gave her money, and told her to come to him if she was ever in want.

She thought of this man now, and she said to herself that he would be just the one to take Hester to. He would not refuse her request to put her on the stage, especially if he once heard the girl sing. She found the manager in his

office when she called with Hester the following day.

Mr. Dudley, the manager, held out his hand kindly to the woman. He was annoyed at himself that he had forgotten her name, so great was the service she had rendered him.

"I am pleased to see you—Mrs.—Mrs."

"For a moment Mary Seymour hesitated. She remembered quite well the name she had given him as Ann Reardon and not Mary Seymour, so Ann Reardon she must still be."

"Mrs. Reardon," she answered, after a moment's pause.

"How long have you been in London?" he asked, ready to chat with her, no matter how busy he was.

Then he caught sight of the young girl standing timidly behind her. The rare beauty of the face, dark though it was, caused him to take a second glance.

"My daughter, Victoria, sir," said the woman, noting with much satisfaction the rapt gaze which he bent upon the girl. "I am here to ask a great favour of you, sir," she said. "I do hope you will not think it bold or impertinent of me."

"Nothing that you could ask or I could grant would ever seem an impertinence to me, Mrs. Reardon. What is it that you would ask of me, please?"

"I would like you to hear my daughter sing, Mr. Dudley."

He smiled good-naturedly. It was his experience that every woman who knew one note from another thought she had a talent for music. He would not refuse her, though a line of people were waiting to see him.

"I can give you but ten minutes to-day," said Mr. Dudley, looking at his watch. "If you could but wait till next week I could spare you an hour."

"I would rather take the ten minutes now," said Ann Reardon.

He smiled at her enthusiasm, and settled himself down in his chair to await her pleasure.

"My dear Victoria," she said, suavely, turning to the girl, "the gentleman is ready to hear you sing. You might begin with 'The Bells of London.'"

The manager settled himself back in his seat, believing that he was certainly in for at least ten minutes of torture. He had such an acute ear for music; it was painful to him to hear an uncultivated voice.

Slowly the girl began. By the time she had reached the third line of the first verse the manager had sprung from his seat, and was looking at her with his whole soul in his eyes. When she had finished, Mr. Dudley caught the girl by the hand.

"What do you think of her singing, sir!" said Mrs. Reardon, in a triumphant voice.

"She sings like an angel from Heaven!" he cried, enthusiastically. "Good Heaven's! your daughter is a veritable jewel, madam—a queen of song. I am glad that you brought her to me. I will give her a chance. The world shall hear of her—ay, the whole country shall be at her feet."

The young girl had retreated modestly, and had sunk down into the seat she had first occupied upon entering the room.

"The girl is as modest as a flower," thought the manager, gazing at her admiringly.

He forgot the great crowd waiting for him—forgot everything, save the girl who had entranced him with the wonderful melody of her voice.

"You need never know a day's hard work, madame, with a daughter who has a voice like that. Only the wonderful Patti could equal it, and in my opinion she could not surpass it. But as yet it is uncultivated. Place her under my care, and I will see that she has the best tutor money can procure."

"I—I could not be parted from her," said Ann Reardon. "It has often been said that the most perfect fruit has its specks; the most perfect girls have defects. My Victoria has recently recovered from a serious illness which I thought would cost her her life. It has left her with a mind like a child's. The doctor assures me that it will be all right some day. All that she

remembers of her old life is her music. It is strange that she should remember that and forget all else."

"Certain fevers leave them in that way, I have heard say. It is pitiful in the case of your daughter, she is such an unusually beautiful young woman."

"Thank you, sir," she answered, with a courtesy.

"Of course, if that is the case, you two cannot be separated. I shall have to make arrangements for both."

"You are very kind to think of me, sir," said Ann Reardon.

Mr. Dudley was as good as his word. He engaged rooms for the young girl and her mother at a beautiful suburban place very near his own home.

The music-master who was selected was quite as enthusiastic over his pupils as Mr. Dudley had been.

"You are quite right," he declared. "The young girl is indeed a wonderful genius. She sings like a bird. If I might express my opinion, I would say the woman is holding something back from you. The young girl has had the best of training. Nothing is new to her. You know that this would not be true of a novice."

"Impossible," said Mr. Dudley. "Her mother is a poor woman, and could not have spared the amount necessary to have her voice trained by an experienced teacher."

"But I assure you this has been done," said the young professor.

"There is one thing I would warn you against," said the manager, smiling, "and that is, not to fall in love with that little beauty. You know that we managers always stipulate in the contracts we make with these pretty artists that they are not to marry."

The young professor flushed to the roots of his fair curly hair. He did not answer that the mischief had already been done. He had fallen in love with the young girl at first sight, though he said to himself,—

"She will not be likely to fall in love or marry soon, for that diuenna of a mother never leaves her alone for a single moment."

The girl's whole soul seemed to be wrapped up in music; she could think of nothing else.

The young professor took the most wonderful interest in her. He said to himself that she should be the greatest success in the world, if he had the power to make her so.

Everyone with whom she came in contact appeared to take a great interest in Victoria. This did not please her mother.

"I should like better to get away somewhere quietly. It greatly annoys my Victoria to be troubled with so many people. She does not like it, I assure you."

"So charming a young girl cannot but attract attention," declared Mr. Dudley. "But if you insist upon moving farther away, why, of course, I will see and get you a cottage. My daughter Jennie has taken quite a fancy to your daughter. I hope you will not banish her from your cottage."

Ann Reardon bit her lip vexedly. She could not deny the manager's daughter admission, such as she would like to have done so. She made up her mind, however, that she would make it none too pleasant for her.

Jennie Dudley had indeed taken a great fancy to the beautiful, silent girl whose mind seemed to be so cruelly shattered that she had not the slightest remembrance of her past life, and whose soul was devoted to music.

Jennie Dudley soon noticed what was apparent to everyone else, that Victoria's mother never left her alone for a moment. She grew strangely nervous when Jennie began to talk to the girl of her past life, urging her to try and remember some part of it.

"Never mind; the past will all come back to you as suddenly as it went," declared Jennie.

She wondered why Victoria's mother looked at her with such a strange glint in her eyes.

The woman said to herself that Jennie Dudley could never see the girl again.

CHAPTER XLIV.

The great attachment which had sprung up between Jennie Dudley and Victoria Reardon alarmed Ann Reardon, who was palming herself off as Hester's mother.

She said to herself that she stood between two fires.

If she refused the girl the house, it would rouse the enmity of the father, and put her out of the chance of making a fortune through Hester. If she allowed her to come, the two young girls might become too intimate, and no one could tell what the result might be.

Already the girl had commenced to talk over her little love affairs with Victoria, as she called her.

If by any chance the flood of memory should become awakened, in an instant of time all her plans would become upset.

There was one conversation between Victoria and Jennie, which would have given her great cause for fright, had she heard it.

The two girls were sitting alone one afternoon outside the cottage, conversing on indifferent subjects, when suddenly Jennie turned to her companion, saying,—

"I have been thinking about your strange loss of memory, and the more I think of it, the more wonderful it seems to me. Can you remember anything whatever of your former life, that is, before you were taken ill?"

"No; nothing whatever," said Victoria, sadly. "I cannot even remember the instances that my mother tells me about. She says we lived a very uneventful life, ever since my father died."

"We were not very well to do, so she supported herself and me with her needle. I had a great aptitude for music, and every shilling she could spare she lavished upon me, with the hope that some day, when she was not able to work any more, I might turn my talent to account."

"Then I fell ill with a terrible fever. They thought I would not recover; but I did. Still, the sickness had left its mark. I was like a little child; I could remember nothing whatever. I did not even remember mother."

"The love of music, which had been so deeply rooted in my soul, was the only thing which I could recall, and mother thought it best to bring me away from those scenes, with the hope that some day memory would come back to me. But I am beginning to doubt it. I have such strange fancies too at times. Sometimes I think you are someone else, when I see you coming toward me—some girl with a dark, proud, haughty face. What her name was I often try to think, but it is useless—useless."

"I will call over all the girls' names you may have known, and see if any name was hers," said Jennie.

Name after name was repeated, but Victoria shook her head.

"I am sure it was none of those," she said.

"The way you shake your head my dear, reminds me of a young gentleman whom I met recently," said Jennie. "By the way, he is a real lord, young and handsome. Did you ever see a lord?"

Victoria passed her hand over her forehead in a dazed way. "A lord!" she repeated. Then, after a moment of deep thought, she repeated,—

"No, I am sure I have never seen one."

"Oh, but he was handsome," declared Jennie. "He had a great sorrow, people said—the loss of a sweetheart whom he was about to marry. My father met him, and they became quite well acquainted. I teased papa to invite him here, but he declared that the young lord would only refuse."

"But I kept on insisting, and teased so hard that at last papa consented to humour my whim. And what do you think, Victoria! He has actually consented to come here, but he hasn't set the date. All the girls I know are just dying with envy over the matter. It isn't every girl who has the honour of entertaining a real live lord. If he isn't too much bound up with the memory of his lost sweetheart, perhaps he may take a fancy to me."

"You know that there is an old saw which says that hearts are oftener caught in the rebound

than in any other way. I might be able to console him."

"But it takes two to make a bargain. When he comes, I shall bring him over to see papa's new *protégée*, your charming self, making the proviso beforehand that you will not try to cut me out and fascinate the handsome young lord yourself."

"There is no fear," said Victoria. "I never had a lover; I never want one."

"Why, what manner of girl can you be!" cried her friend. "I am only eighteen, and I have had lovers by the score. They have fought duels over me, wanted to elope with me, and all that sort of thing. You are quite as old as I am, and to say that you have never had a lover seems so funny to me."

"My mother is very strict," said Victoria. "She warns me every day to beware of men."

"Of course I don't want to say anything about your mamma, but I think that is all nonsense," declared Jennie, with a mischievous little laugh. "One would think men were ogres, to hear you speak, when in fact they are charming companions. You must be quite my own age; and never to have had a lover! I cannot help thinking how funny that must be. You must have one. When the young lord comes up I will invite some other fellow for you, and tease your mother to let you go with me boating, to picnics, and all that sort of thing. I will see that you do not make a recluse of yourself—that would never do."

"When did you say he was coming?" asked Victoria, dreamily.

"I do not know the exact date, but he wrote he would be sure to come in a short time. He has such a romantic name—the prettiest one I have ever heard. It is Wyndham Powis. There, did you ever hear anything that sounded so nicely?"

"Wyndham Powis," repeated Victoria. "The name sounds like strange forgotten music to me."

"You couldn't have met him," said Jennie; for he is very rich, and wouldn't be apt to meet anyone who wasn't in his set. There's a good deal in that. All the girls are just dying to see the handsome young lord, but I'll not introduce one of them. I do not believe in finding lovers for other girls; it's hard enough to find them for one's self. But dear me, here's your mother; I must run."

"What was that girl talking about!" asked Ann Reardon, watching the girl's slim figure as she ran lightly down the walk toward the gate.

"About her lovers," returned the girl, dreamily.

"She has a new one."

"Don't let her put rubbish into your head," exclaimed the woman, angrily. "She'd better get a little sense before she wastes her thoughts upon men that don't amount to anything. You must have nothing more to do with her, Victoria. I do not approve of a girl companion whose sole thoughts is of men, men. Break off with her, I say, Victoria."

"Her friendship is such a great comfort to me," said the girl, wistfully. "Her coming is like rays of sunshine."

"There, I thought she was getting an influence over you," said the woman. "This settles it. I will have to see that she stays away from you. She will spoil your prospects. You cannot think of your business, and of men, men, men, at the same time. One or the other will suffer. You will have me turned out-of-doors, at this rate, in my old age, after me spending my life in giving you all the advantages I possibly could. That's what poor mothers always get for wasting their lives on thankless daughters. Serves me right, I suppose. I should have spent my money on myself, and had the good of it. Hes—Victoria," she said, her voice husky with emotion, "promise me that you will not again think of anything she has told you."

"I—I—will promise if you wish," answered the girl, shocked somewhat at the agitation she had caused.

Over and over again she made her repeat her promise, until she could find nothing more to say to this patient creature, who clasped her little thin hands within her own, and who was looking at her with such tired eyes.

Hester hardly knew what she said in her confusion and nervousness. She spoke to her in her ordinary manner, but Ann Reardon noticed how very pale her face had grown, and that her eyes had dark lines under them. She was looking off in the distance, and the hand that touched hers was cold and shook a little.

Although the girl had told her companion, Jennie Dudley, that she did not care for love or lovers, she found herself continually thinking of the young man who was to visit her friend.

Jennie's remark, "I will bring you to see him, providing you will promise not to cut me out with him," haunted her for a long time. She could not remember, however, the name she had mentioned, try as hard as she would. Should she see him, or should she not?

"I will be sure and let fate answer the question for me," she told herself, stooping down and picking up a four-leaf clover which, by the merest chance, she found growing at her feet. "If I find another four-leaf clover in this same tuft of grass, I—I will let Jennie bring me over. If I do not find one, I—I—shall refuse to see him."

The girl knelt down among the sweet pink clover with something very like a sigh on her lips. The next moment a little cry escaped them. Nodding backward and forward, waited by a passing breeze, she found another four-leaf clover, surely the mate of the one she held in her hand.

"I will see Jennie's friend," she murmured, a slight flush creeping into her pale cheeks, her heart beating a trifle more swiftly than was its wont. "Little four-leaf clover, you have decided the matter," she repeated.

At that moment one of the servants brought a note to the cottage. It was from Jennie, to Victoria, and read as follows:

"I received a telegram from the young lord. He will be here to-morrow night. You must be sure to come over and help me welcome him."

(To be continued.)

A RETROSPECT.

Whom we first love, you know, we seldom wed.
Time rules us all. And life, indeed, is not
The thing we planned it out for hope was dead;
And then we women cannot choose our lot.

Much must be borne which it is hard to bear;
Much given away which it were sweet to keep.
God help us all! who need, indeed, his care.
And yet, I know, the Shepherd loves his sheep.

My little boy begins to babble now
Upon my knee his earliest infant prayer.
He has his father's eager eyes, I know,
And they say, too, his mother's sunny hair.

But when he sleeps and smiles upon my knee
And I can feel his breath come and go,
I think of one (Heaven help and pity me!)
Who loved me, and whom I loved, long ago.

Who might have been—ah, what I dare not
think!
We all are changed; God judges us the best.
God helps us do our duty and not shrink.
And trust in Heaven humbly for the rest.

But blame us women not if some appear
Too cold at times, and some too gay and light.
Some griefs gnaw deep, some woes are hard to
bear—
Who knows the past, and who can judge us
right!

Ah, were we judged by what we might have been,
And not by what we are, too apt to fall!
My little child—he sleeps and smiles between
Those thoughts and me. In heaven we shall
know all.

CHRONIC INDIGESTION and its attendant Misery and Suffering Cured with Tonic "Docrosa" (purely vegetable), 2/6, from Chemists, 3/-, post free from Dr. Houn, "Glendower," Bournemouth. Sample bottle and pamphlet, with Analytical Reports, &c., 6 Stamps.

MEN AND THEIR WIVES.

THE relations of man and wife ought, in the first place, to be marked by invariable mildness and kindness—the proofs of profound attachment and exhaustless esteem. The most perfect confidence ought to exist between man and wife, for harmony and happiness cannot exist without.

Confidence is the moral chain that unites man to woman. When the place of confidence is usurped by suspicion, then comes a monster who breeds quarrels and even hatred—jealousy. There is a great deal of selfishness in jealousy. Those who are most ready to entertain so bitter a sentiment are not so much annoyed at their partner loving another, as that he or she no longer loves her or him. If the first suspicions of want of allegiance are met by an increased kindness and attention, the frail partner is at once reclaimed to a sense of duty; but if met by the indication of an injured pride and vanity, by ill-humour, moroseness, and irascibility, the partner for life is often lost for ever. But the fact is, that suspicions should never be indulged in.

The expression of an unjust suspicion alienates love and esteem for ever. If there is foundation for such, it is no longer suspicion but reality, and to be great or gracious the culprit should be pardoned. The frail party will be thus reclaimed. There is no greater sign of folly and stupidity than a suspicious and jealous disposition.

Not to be jealous, is by some supposed to be indifferent, whereas it is want of amiability and kindly attentions that marks indifference. To please and to be loved, the qualities of the heart must be united to the riches of the mind. It is an incontestable thing that kindly attentions, managed with intelligence and delicacy, both win and hold in their keeping more hearts than physical beauty can ever command.

A man should not be exacting or dissatisfied with what his wife does. He should always begin by reforming himself, before he criticises his wife's faults. It is a wiser policy to approve than to disapprove, and ensures peace at home. But above everything a man must never be passionate or rude to his wife. The first and slightest intimation of such want of self-control destroys for ever the most delicate and the most exquisite illusion in the intercourse of the sexes.

A man should not oppress his wife with his assumed superiority of intelligence. He should, on the contrary, listen to her advice with eagerness for the slightest symptoms of contempt touches a woman to the quick, and a woman whose pride has been hurt by her husband can always find her own means of revenge. Words that humiliate, remarks that bring forth a blush, hints that wound self-love, should be carefully avoided. A man should always stand in such a relation to his wife that she can never feel the wish to seek consolation by relating her troubles to another. If she does so to a female, the latter will poison her mind; if she does so to a man, the husband has already lost all moral ascendancy.

Patience is one of the most important qualities in a good husband. It is requisite in order to understand a wife's character, a thing never easily arrived at. It is necessary in order to enter into all those graceful trifles which more particularly characterize a woman's conduct. If, when a wife is playful and caressing, the husband is morose and indifferent, repugnance gradually results. When a man's tastes do not assimilate with his wife's, the woman can be brought to sympathise with his sentiments by patient cultivation, but never by abrupt proceedings.

THERE is a clock at Brussels which comes about as near being a perpetual-motion machine as can be invented. A shaft exposed to the solar rays causes an up-draught of air, which sets the fan in motion. The fan actuates mechanism which raises the weight of the clock until it reaches the top, and then puts a brake on the fan till the weight has gone down a little, when the fan is again liberated, and proceeds to act as before.

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FACETIÆ.

"SIR, I am a self-made man!" "Who interrupted you!"

"ALGY seems to have something on his mind," said the dark girl. "Yes," said the fair girl, "Algy's mind seems to be completely hidden."

MRS. CRIMSONBEAK: "Are you sure you came straight home from the office last night, John?" Mr. Crimsonbeak: "Well, as straight as I could, dear."

"He told me, papa, that his sole aim in life would be to make me happy." "Who the dickens is going to earn the living, then?" snorted the old gentleman.

A: "I had a great surprise last evening." R: "How was that?" A: "My wife introduced me to a fellow who never was one of her old admirers."

HICKS: "What a confounded chatter those women are keeping up in that room! Wonder what they're up to?" Wicks: "Having a game of whist, I believe." "Of course; I ought to have known it."

"I THINK," said young Mrs. Torkins, "that we shall all like the new servant better than we did the other." "For what reason?" inquired her husband. "She carries a smaller basket to and from her home."

"So you want to be my son-in-law, do you?" asked the old man, with as much fierceness as he could assume. "Well," said the young man, standing first on one foot and then on the other. "I suppose I'll have to be if I marry Maude."

MRS. YOUNG (proudly): "The landlord was here to-day; I gave him the quarter's rent, and showed him the baby." Young (who was kept awake last night): "It would have been better, my dear, if you had given him the baby and shown him the quarter's rent."

"SAY, that woman ahead of me has such a big hat that I can't see the play. Won't you give me another seat?" Witherby said to the ticket seller. "Why don't you ask her to take it off?" asked the ticket seller. "Not much! She's my wife."

"It's very cruel indeed of you, Dolly, to hurt a poor innocent worm like that," said a mother to her little girl. "But, mamma, he looked so lonely all by himself; so I just cut him in two for company, and the two of him wiggled off together, just ever so happy!"

"No, sir," she exclaimed, stamping her little foot. "I will never marry you! Do I make myself plain?" "No," he answered. "In your anger you make yourself positively beautiful." "George, I am yours!" she sighed, as she collapsed in his arms.

"I HAVE heard," he said, in his confident way, "that freckles may be removed by kissing." "So it is said," she replied, coldly, for she had one or two little freckles; "but I suppose, even so, one is entitled to choose her own specialist!" Then he realised that he had made an error somewhere in his calculations.

"MISTRE," said the small boy to the chemist, "give me another bottle of them pills you sold father day before yesterday." "Are they doing him good?" asked the chemist, looking pleased. "I do no whether they're doin' father any good or not, but they're doin' me good. They just fit my new air gun!"

EDWIN (as they reached the summit of the mountain after a long climb)—"Ah! here we are at last. What a magnificent view! At such a time and place I feel strange sensations—an indefinable longing, a soul craving, as it were, which—" Angelina: "My dear Edwin, what you want is a sandwich."

It was an hour past midnight, and Mr. Binns was fumbling about in the hall and mumbling angrily to himself. "What's the matter!" called out Mrs. Binns, from the floor above. "There's two batrach's here," he answered, "an' I don't know which one to hang my hat on." "You've got two hats, haven't you?" rejoined Mrs. Binns. "Hang them on both."

"AFTER all, the sum of human happiness may be put in three words," said madame. "What the dickens are they?" inquired monsieur. "I love you." "Oh, I didn't know but you meant 'Pay to bearer.'"

"THANK you," said the lady to the man who gave her his seat in the street-car. "You surprise me," said the man. "How do you mean?" "By that 'thank you.'" She smiled. "I couldn't have surprised you more than you surprised me by offering me your seat." The stand-off was thus completed.

"MRS. JINGLE says her husband never finds fault with the breakfast," she remarked. "What of that?" inquired he. "Nothing much; only I was thinking how lucky she is to have such a good husband." "Humph! Maybe there's something in that. I was thinking how lucky Jingle was to have such good breakfasts."

LAME PEOPLE

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Have the largest sale of any Dentifrices, most effective for preserving the Teeth and strengthening the Gums. Useful to prevent infection, by inhalation.—6d., 1s., and 1s. 6d. Tins; 6d., 1s., and 1s. 6d. Pots.

CARBOLIC TOILET SOAP AND PRICKLY HEAT SOAP.

Pure Antiseptic Soaps for the Skin and Complexion, and help to prevent contagion. After cycling and other out-door exercise they are especially beneficial. 1s. 6d., 3-Tablet Boxes; 6d. and 1s. Bars.

PREVENT FEVERS BY USING CALVERT'S CARBOLIC POWDER

to destroy all noxious or infectious odours from Closets or offensive refuse.

The Powder is guaranteed to contain 10 per cent. of Calvert's No. 5 Carbolic—the STRONGEST Disinfectant known—and is sold in 6d., 1s. and 1s. 6d. Dredgers.

Can be obtained at most Chemists, Stores, &c., or 1s. worth and upwards post free for value.

BUYERS ARE WARNED against inferior imitations, which are numerous. ILLUSTRATED DESCRIPTIVE PAMPHLET POST FREE on APPLICATION.

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AWARDED 75 GOLD AND SILVER MEDALS AND DIPLOMAS.

SOCIETY.

KID GLOVES, with hand-painted flowers "on the back, are the latest fad in Paris.

THE Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse are coming to England next month for a stay of four or five weeks.

THE loyal and patriotic people of Windsor, assisted by the surrounding neighbourhood, have subscribed the magnificent sum of £2,366 for the Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

THE Princess of Wales is the owner of a beautiful pair of opera-glasses of platinum set with rubies, sapphires, and turquoises, that is valued at £2,000.

THE Duchess of Fife has followed the example of her mother, and invested in a spinning-wheel. It is a very pretty one, of black walnut, mounted with brass, and although one hundred years old, is still in excellent working condition. With this wheel the Duchess spins her yarn, which she knits into golf stockings for her husband.

As a mere spectacle, the scene on the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral when the Queen makes her public thanksgiving on June 22nd promises to be unusually brilliant, for the clergy, as in June 1887, are not to appear in their ordinary sombre-looking garb of black and white, but will be handsomely vested in richly embroidered copes, the bishops wearing their splendidly vivid Convocation robes of scarlet.

THE State Crown is not, as many suppose, an ancient one. Much of it consists of jewels taken from old Crowns or supplied to the Queen's order in 1838, and worn at the Coronation. The Maltese Cross in front is made of diamonds, and in its centre is the ruby which the King of Castile is said to have given to the Black Prince after the Battle of Poitiers.

As Mayor of Sheffield, the Duke of Norfolk will entertain fifty thousand children in Norfolk Park on the occasion of Her Majesty's visit to Steelopolis. The Queen will drive out through the assembled children, who will sing the National Anthem as the Royal carriage approaches. The Duke is also going to entertain on his Sussex property all the children under sixteen in three parishes. A *fête* will be given to them in Arundel Park on Saturday, June 26th. His Grace will be present, and each child is to be presented with a commemorative medal.

For her rooms at Cliveden the Queen chose mahogany furniture to a very great extent, for she admires the high polish this old-fashioned wood takes. For her own bedroom draperies and furniture coverings she gave preference to pink; blue and yellow being used in her private sitting-room. One reception-room is furnished in the Empire style, with red and yellow draperies, and the dining-room is carried out in walnutwood and red velvet. Princess Henry of Battenberg chose light blue for her boudoir, and yellow for her bedroom.

PRINCESS ALEXANDRINE the fiancée of Prince Joseph of Battenberg was born in 1879, and is the eldest of the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Mecklenburg-Schwerin's three children, there being a younger brother and sister. She is possessed of considerable beauty, and is both charming and accomplished. Although she, with her parents, spends much time away from home, she is extremely popular in Mecklenburg. The Grand Duchess, to whom Princess Alexandrine is considered to bear a considerable likeness, has bestowed much time upon her children's education, which, although very religious, has been entirely free from all bigotry. The young Princess is full of life, fond of music and outdoor exercise, and much beloved by her friends amongst the young ladies of the Mecklenburg aristocracy. The engagement is a pure love affair, and there is all the more reason to believe it in this case, as there is no political sympathy between Denmark and Mecklenburg. The Princess is, however, sure of receiving a warm welcome in her new country where she and her father are expected to pay a visit during May.

STATISTICS.

It has been computed that between 36,000,000 and 37,000,000 babies arrive each year.

THE consumption of soap in India only reaches the modest amount of one ounce per head annually.

A STATISTICAL fiend has figured that the 4,150,000 cigarettes manufactured during last year would reach 180,121 miles if they were placed end to end in line, or would girdle the earth more than seven times.

THE number of horses that run in races last year was 3,100, and during the season the total amount of money won in stakes amounted to over £446,000. But the yearly value of the stakes in steeplechase and hurdle-races is something like half a million.

THE total number of blind in the United States is nearly 49,000, or 976 in each million of the population. The number of blind reported as receiving instruction is given as 4,661. The number of blind who are also deaf mutes is: whites, 84 males and 107 females; coloured, 28 males and 29 females; blind and idiotic, whites, 595 males, 463 females; coloured, 66 males, 62 females.

GEMS.

WHEN people find out that it is blessed to give they never want to stop.

HE who tells a lie is not sensible how great a task he undertakes; for he must be forced to invent twenty more to maintain one.

SOME men are more beholden to their bitterest enemies than to friends who appear to be sweetness itself. The former frequently tell the truth, but the latter never.

DECIDE not yourself with the notion that you may be untrue and uncertain in trifles, and in important things the contrary; trifles make up existence, and give the observer the measure by which to try us; and the fearful power of habit after a time suffers not the best will to ripen into action.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PLAIN GINGERBREAD.—Stir a teaspoonful of soda dissolved into one cup of molasses, add two tablespoonfuls of butter, one cup boiling water, one tablespoonful ginger, and three cups flour. Beat hard, and bake in a well-greased pan for three-quarters of an hour, in a slow oven.

POTATO PUFF.—Two cupfuls of mashed potatoes; two tablespoonfuls of melted butter. Stir these, with a seasoning of salt, to a light, fine, creamy consistency. Beat two eggs separately, and add six tablespoonfuls of cream. Beat all together, well and lightly. Pile in an irregular form in a dish. Bake in a quick oven until nicely coloured.

MOCK MINCE PIE.—Seven soda crackers rolled fine, two cups cold water, one cup molasses, one cup of brown sugar, one cup sour cider, one and a half cups melted butter, one cup raisins, one cup currants, one tablespoonful allspice mixed, one teaspoonful nutmeg, one teaspoonful cloves, one teaspoonful salt, one teaspoonful black pepper, one wineglass of brandy, two eggs.

ASPARAGUS SALAD.—Rub three hard-boiled egg yolks through a sieve. Put them in a bowl with two raw yolks, salt, pepper, and a tablespoonful of prepared mustard; stir with a wooden spoon, and add slowly two gills of salad oil and a little vinegar, with two tablespoonfuls of finely chopped herbs—parsley, tarragon, chives and shallot. This to be poured over the cold boiled asparagus.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Chinese preserve eggs by coating them with mud.

THE Chinese condemn criminals to death by preventing sleep. Sufferers last from twelve to twenty days when death comes to their relief.

THE big ocean greyhounds will soon, it is thought, be equipped with lifeboats harnessed to balloons, so as to be practically unsinkable.

A FRENCH professor is the owner of a collection of human heads representing every known race of people on the globe.

OVER 400 diamonds are known to have been recovered from the ruins of Babylon. Many are uncut, but most are polished on one or two sides.

It is said that the Indian library of the British India Office, which is now being catalogued, will be, when finished, the most complete collection of Oriental literature in the world.

ABOUT 365 tons of gold are estimated to be in actual circulation as money in the United Kingdom, that being approximately the weight of £110,000,000 sterling.

A ALOX bicycle is in use in Glasgow for hiring purposes. The cost is a penny for every five miles travelled, and if the wheelman neglects to drop in a penny at the end of each five miles the wheels refuse to turn.

IN the neighbourhood of the Bermudas the sea is extremely transparent, so that the fishermen can readily see the horns of lobsters protruding from their hiding-places in the rocks at considerable depths. To entice the lobster from these crannies they tie a lot of snails in a ball and dangle them in front of his horns. When he grabs the ball they haul him up.

TO the ignominy of a Frenchman, Paul Giffard, is attributed a "miracle gun," a repeating rifle which requires no gunpowder. The projecting force is liquefied air, obtained under pressure at a temperature of hundreds of degrees below zero, thus representing an enormous expansive power. There is no smoke, no flash, and only a sharp and low report.

IN the neighbourhood of the Bermudas the sea is extremely transparent, so that the fishermen can readily see the horns of the lobsters protruding from their hiding places in the rocks at considerable depth. To entice the crustaceans from these crannies they tie a lot of snails in a ball and dangle them in front of the cautious lobster. When he grabs the ball they haul him up.

IN some of the Eastern countries, notably Arabia and Persia, a manna answering closely to that mentioned in the Scriptures is still naturally produced in considerable quantity. It comes from the tender branches of the tamarisk, and is known to the Persians by the name "tamarisk honey." It consists of tear-like drops which exude in consequence of the puncture of an insect during the months of June and July.

AMONG the novelties is a bicycle rim made of several pieces of wood securely cemented together. This wood is steamed and split, then shaped under hydraulic pressure. It is, of course, saturated with a waterproof substance, and is unaffected by dampness. The advantage claimed is that the fibres of the wood run parallel and, being lapped around and around, are stronger than those made so as to be joined at any particular point. The improvement in rims is one of the features of the '97 wheels.

A BAROMETER designed automatically to sound an alarm when there is a sudden change of atmospheric pressure, such as occurs in advance of a cyclone or wind storm, has recently been patented. Tests have shown that it gives an alarm some two minutes before the first blast of a storm occurs. Certain variations in the movement of the mercury in the two tubes are made to give an alarm by means of floats in the tubes connected with wires in an electric circuit, there being on one wire a fork and on the other a tongue, by which contacts are made to ring an alarm when the points meet.



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Eminent Medical Men, Officers of Health, and Trained Nurses, recommend Lifebuoy Soap for use during Epidemics.

Manufactured by the Proprietors of **SUNLIGHT SOAP** Soapmakers to Her Majesty **THE QUEEN**.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. K.—One is sufficient.

F. B.—He cannot remove it by force.

Vera.—Submit the implement to an expert.

RALPH.—We cannot advise; it is a case for a lawyer.

SARNEY.—Bervie is a small town in Kincardineshire, Scotland.

IGNORANT.—Address as you would to an ordinary stranger.

VERY PUNISHED.—The man is looking at a portrait of his own son.

MORRIS.—The last public execution in England took place in 1868.

REPURK.—The Speaker and forty members constitute a House of Commons.

H. B.—There is nothing irregular in a husband and wife witnessing the same will.

U. C.—There are in almost all libraries books of family records and genealogical lives.

STREPER.—Church bells are tuned by chipping the edge until the proper note is obtained.

CONSTANT READER.—Occasionally it is permitted, but only under very exceptional circumstances.

IN DIFFICULTY.—You should apply to a respectable solicitor and employ him to act without delay.

FUFFY.—Onions are certainly good for the blood, and anything of that kind will lessen the tendency to skin diseases.

JEMIE.—Wasp's nests often take fire, supposed to be caused by the chemical action of the wax upon the material of the nest itself.

DUNCAN.—Chronic means habitual, constant; incurable means that though the pain may be lessened the ailment can never be got rid of.

O. F.—There is no plan which we can suggest for your benefit and we fear that you will find the matter far more difficult than you imagined.

NELSON.—The use of aluminum in ship construction has been quite general during the past three years, and as a whole the results have been satisfactory.

MISERABLE TOM.—If you had proper self-respect you would put an end to such absurd goings on, and leave the incorrigible fiend to find some other victim.

INTERVIEWER.—In view of the fact that there are languages that have no printed matter at all, it would seem impossible that any such thing could exist.

IVY.—You must first ascertain that your wife is dead, otherwise, should you marry again, and it turns out that your first wife is alive, you are liable to prosecution for bigamy.

CRANLITERS.—If your window glass is lacking in brilliancy clean it with a liquid paste, made of alcohol and whiting. A little of this mixture will remove specks and impart a high lustre to the glass.

ANXIOUS READER.—As you know where they resided some time ago why not address a letter to them by name? Put upon the envelope a request that if they have removed and their address is unknown the letter may be returned to you.

THE FELLOW TRAVELLERS.

Given fair, say thou wilt be
Fellow traveller with me,
Gliding through the dell;
Though to meet thy kindred see,
I my Christabel.

Wilt thou join me, hand in hand
Thus to greet the favoured land
Where loved spirits dwell;
Thou embracing ocean's strand,
I my Christabel!

River onward, true and brave,
Speed we by each rock and cove,
As by magic spell,
Though to wed thine ocean wave,
I my Christabel!

STEWARDS.—We can give only a general answer; the duties are a combination of the work of nurse, lady's maid, and chamber maid; they involve attendance, both in sleeping apartment and saloon, on women and children.

GAIRY.—Some sorts will not bear cleaning; others clean and do up well. You had better take it to a professional cleaner's, we cannot advise without seeing it, and have no room to give recipes on chance of their being useful.

ST. MICHAEL.—The reason that Mount St. Michael, off the coast of Normandy, and St. Michael's Mount, off the coast of Cornwall, bear the same name is because the latter was once a dependency of the monastery which crowned the former.

JOSUE.—Put a thick layer of flour into a baking pan and place in a hot oven. Watch it and stir it with a spoon until the flour is well browned all through. When it becomes cold, put into preserve jars and cover closely. This is splendid for gravies and sauces.

LENN.—There are many persons who do not approve of postponing weddings. They are, or should be, very solemn occasions, and the fact of death having crossed the threshold just before makes the ceremony doubly solemn and impressive. Everything depends on the manner in which such affairs are conducted.

B. G. I.—Grease up the holes by help of needles, pins, or whatever you find convenient. It is a troublesome operation, but can be done by perseverance. Let the oil or greasy stuff remain, filling the holes for at least a week, then cleanse all well; we generally use strong solution of washing soda in warm water for this purpose. The holes should then be stopped with a mixture of gum and gelatine, and when dry apply over all a varnish of resin dissolved in spirits of wine.

ROSE, THISTLE AND SHAMROCK.—The rose was adopted as an emblem of England in the time of the Tudors, after the cessation of the War of the Roses; the thistle from the incident of a Dane treading on one, and, by his cries of pain, alarming the Scottish camp, and saving the army from destruction; the shamrock, or three-leaved grass, was by the early Irish considered an emblem of the Trinity, brought to Ireland by St. Patrick, for it became the badge of the nation.

G. ELLERMAN.—While we are always pleased to hear from our readers, especially those of so many years standing like yourself, we must of course point out that we reserve to ourselves the right to conduct our journal in our own way. Your advice is, no doubt, meant kindly, but we must respectfully decline to be dictated to in this matter. We were glad to get your second communication. We purchased the story in question years before the one you mention as being very similar was published in book form.

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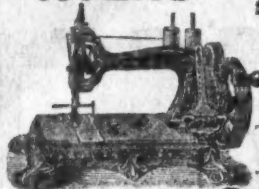
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